PRIORITIES AND DOMINION

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AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW

GARY NORTH

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Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew

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This book is dedicated to

John Schaub

a businessman who has his priorities straight

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INTRODUCTION

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

MATTHEW 6:33

A. The Centrality of God's Kingdom

Jesus made it clear that seeking God's kingdom is priority number one for the individual. Most people today and in the past have not acknowledged this fact, not even to themselves. They suppress the truth that their own nature and the creation reveal about God (Rom. 1:18–25).[1] This does not mean that Jesus was wrong about mankind's top priority. It means only that most men are in rebellion against God.

Evangelical Christians too often believe that God's top priority is the salvation of men. This is a man-centered viewpoint, a kind of baptized humanism for Christians. It makes them think that they are the center of God's concern. They are not. God is the center of God's concern. *The universe is theocentric*.

If the salvation of men were God's primary concern, then He is surely suffering a massive program failure, for comparatively few people so far have been saved. The glory of God, which includes hell (Luke 16:23) and the post-final judgment lake of fire (Rev. 20:15), is God's chief priority. The salvation of men is God's means of extending His kingdom in history, but the way in which it is built, which includes the eternal destruction of those who oppose His kingdom, is part of God's decree. As Paul wrote, "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I

1. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press. [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:17–18). The destruction of His enemies glorifies God.

Jesus defined a person's personal salvation in terms of entering into the kingdom of God. This kingdom is *spiritual* because men enter it through the Holy Spirit. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). It is also *eternal* (Rev. 21; 22). It is also *historical*. As the parable of Lazarus and the rich man indicates, men enter God's kingdom only in history (Luke 16:19–31).[2] *There is continuity between the historical and eternal aspects of God's kingdom*. This continuity will be revealed for all to see at the Second Coming/general resurrection (I Cor. 15:40–50) and the final judgment which immediately follows: the corporate spiritual inheritance of the saints (I Cor. 15:51–57).[3] There is also continuity personally: heavenly eternal rewards will be handed out in terms of a person's earthly productivity in building God's historical kingdom.

> For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Cor. 3:11–15).[4]

Finding and then building the kingdom of God in history is the central theme of the New Testament, culminating in the fulfillment of the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21; 22). This theme is an extension to the gentile world of a commandment and promise of the Old Testament: the building of God's city, Zion. This theme is ultimately a recapitulation of the pre-Fall dominion covenant: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 40.

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

4. *Ibid*., ch. 3.

image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26–28).[5] Adam, as God's agent, was assigned this task representatively for all mankind. Through their adoption by God, God's people are commanded to extend His kingdom.

God's kingdom is not limited to the church or the Christian family. It is all-encompassing. God is the creator. Everything that He created is part of His kingdom. To deny this is necessarily to affirm that Satan, through Adam's rebellion, possesses a legal claim to part of the creation. He does not have such a legally valid claim. Adam was merely God's steward, not the original owner. Adam could not forfeit to Satan what he did not own. God's kingdom is therefore co-extensive with the earth: every realm in which men work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Wherever there is sin, there is an area fit for re-conquest.

B. All These Things

Man's top priority is seeking, finding, entering, and building the kingdom of God, but a legitimate secondary priority is the accumulation of wealth, in history and eternity. "All these things" is a comprehensive promise. This is the reward to God's people for kingdom-building. As redeemed men build it, step by step, they are provided with additional capital by God. The same system of *positive economic feedback* that Moses announced to the Israelites also applies to the New Covenant: "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).[6]

"All these things" summarize *the ultimate success indicators for the church in history*: the spoils of a spiritual war and the fruits of the church's labors. The accumulation of wealth is a positive sanction of God's covenant. Rewards are designed to increase covenant-keeping men's faith in God's covenant. The compounding of wealth, including population, is a sign of God's covenantal presence, whenever this

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

wealth is accompanied by faith in God. But compound growth becomes a snare and a delusion when it is stripped of its kingdom-building context. When men move from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of man, marked by a shift from theonomy to autonomy, their wealth testifies against them, and compound growth accumulates negative sanctions in history and eternity. The greatest Old Covenant model of this covenant-breaking autonomy is Egypt. The disinheritance of Egypt at the exodus involved a restitution payment for the enslavement of the Israelites.

C. The Kingdom of God

The Gospel of Matthew,[7] written by a former tax collector, is dedicated to the theme of God's kingdom in history. The other Gospels touch on the same theme, but this Gospel makes it central. The movement from the kingdom of man to the kingdom of God was illustrated by Matthew's visible transfer of allegiance from Caesar to Christ. A symbol of this transfer of allegiance was Matthew's decision to leave the money table and join the disciples.[8]

The kingdom of God is central to history, Matthew teaches. This means that the kingdom is in history, and it shapes history. It overcomes resistance in history. "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Gates are defensive. Hell has gates. Satan's kingdom is on the defensive today. The gates of hell are historical, part of the historical conflict between good and evil. The conflict is now. The church will not batter down hell's gates in the nether world. There is no point of contact between heaven and hell beyond the grave; a great gulf separates them (Luke 16:26). So, the points of conflict are historical. The gates of hell must refer to the kingdom of Satan in history.

The church is never said to have gates, but because of their pessimillennial eschatologies, millions of Christians have a mental image of a besieged church, whose gates cannot be battered down completely by Satan's agents. This outlook reverses the imagery in the text. The church is on the offensive in New Covenant history; Satan's forces are on the defensive. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church *in history*. This points inescapably to postmillennialism.

7. I capitalize Gospel when I am speaking of a book of the Bible, in contrast to the general good news (gospel) of Christ.

8. Chapter 21.

More than the other Gospels, Matthew's is explicitly postmillennial. That is because its theme is the kingdom of God. The kingdom parables of Matthew 13 assert *historical continuity*, meaning that there will be no Rapture into the clouds prior to the general resurrection and final judgment. The imagery of the mustard seed and the leaven (Matt. 13[9] indicates *the growth of the kingdom:* from a tiny seed to a tree, or the leavening of the world's dough. Both images are distinctly postmillennial: a world steadily transformed by a process of continuous growth. As the world is transformed by the gospel, the gates of hell are rolled back.

D. The Dominion Covenant: Discipling the Nations

Matthew's Gospel is the only Gospel in which the Great Commission is announced (Matt. 28:18–20). This call to discipling the nations is comprehensive.[10] It is the New Covenant's application of the dominion covenant.

I have called Genesis 1:26–28 a covenant. Why? Man here takes no covenantal oath to God. No negative sanctions are listed. This is because the covenant here begins with God. Man was not yet created. The members of the Godhead—the language is plural—agreed to make man in their image. There was hierarchy: man under God and the creation under man. There was a law involved: to multiply and subdue the earth. The sanctions were announced only after Adam was created: possession over everything except the forbidden tree, but death for the violation of this sacred boundary. There was an inheritance implied through multiplication: the whole earth subdued by Adam's heirs.

This pre-Adamic covenant defines man and his relation to the creation. The other four covenants require some sort of self-maledictory oath between man and God. Man calls down God's negative sanctions, should he break the oath's terms. This was not true of the dominion covenant. It did not require an oath-bound ratification on man's part. God enumerated the sanctions on man's behalf: *inherit the earth or lose your life*. God spoke on behalf of Himself and man, thereby ratifying the covenant representatively. Mankind through Adam could break the specific terms of the Edenic covenant, and did, but there is no way that he can ever escape the general dominion cov-

9. Chapter 30.

10. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

enant in history. Only in hell can covenant-breaking man escape it: the negative sanction of impotence.

Through Adam's breaking of this covenant in Eden, mankind now faces death. The gospel of Jesus Christ comes with the offer of life. Men are to choose life. This requires each person's ratification of a new covenant: oath-bound subordination to God through His only-begotten son. This new covenant does not annul the original dominion impulse of the broken covenant. It reafirms it in the Great Commission. The subduing of the earth must proceed corporately: the discipling of the nations. Nations must be formally brought under the terms of the New Covenant. This is achieved by the four oath-bound covenants: personal, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil.

E. Christian Social Theory

This emphasis on the socially transforming effects of the gospel makes the Gospel of Matthew an important document in presenting the legal basis of an explicitly Christian social theory. The author was a Jew. More important, he was a Levite. His name in the other Gospels is identified as Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). He was probably a member of the priestly tribe. This is why the Gospel of Matthew is the most Hebraic of the four Gospels. It is more concerned than the others with the kingdom promises given to Israel that the church has now inherited (Matt. 21:43).

This emphasis on the kingdom is why the book has such a strong emphasis on the continuity of God's Old Testament law. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17–18). Matthew is the first book in the New Covenant. This is as it should be: its theme of judicial continuity between the two covenants is strongly emphasized. The book was written on the assumption that its readers would be familiar with the Old Covenant.

The development of Christian social theory begins with the assumption of judicial continuity between the two covenants. Without the continuing judicial authority of the Old Covenant, it would not be possible to develop an explicitly Christian social theory or an explicitly Christian economics. The New Covenant does not abandon Old Covenant social law. On the contrary, it assumes that those sections of the law that were not uniquely tied to Mosaic Israel's seed laws and

land laws are still in force. This is why a detailed understanding of Matthew is so important for the development of Christian economics. The Gospel of Matthew moves from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant by way of the transfer of the kingdom from national Israel to the church (Matt. 21:43).

F. Three Questions

There are three questions that every decision-maker should ask himself before establishing a plan of action:

1. What do I want to achieve?
2. How soon do I want to achieve it?
3. How much am I willing to pay?

The first question is the issue of priorities. The Gospel of Matthew raises the issue of priorities again and again. There are individual priorities, but there are also corporate priorities. Covenants are made by individuals, but only one covenant is between God and man alone: the covenant of salvation. The three others are corporate: church, family, and state. Taken as a unit, these four comprise one covenant: the dominion covenant. They define covenant-keeping man.

If men as individuals do not get their priorities into conformity with God's priorities for them, then their efforts will produce inferior results. This is true of societies, too. Covenant-breaking men seek to build a kingdom on behalf of other gods. All other kingdoms must fail. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Dan. 2:44–45). God has established that His people shall inherit the earth.[11] To build on behalf of another god is to build as the Canaanites built: so that God's people might inherit the work of other men's hands (Deut. 6:10–11). This is why "all these things" shall be added unto His people—not just in eternity but progressively in history.

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11. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

Conclusion

This Gospel is most obviously the transitional document between the Old Covenant and the New: *the transfer of Israel's inheritance to the church*. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). As such, this Gospel is crucial for our understanding of covenantal cause and effect in history. Christian economic theory must begin with the assumption of judicial continuity—sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and inheritance—between the two covenants. Without this continuity, Christian economics would be some baptized version of autonomy. It would be no more permanent than the minds of autonomous men. Matthew's Gospel provides considerable information on the nature of covenantal continuity.

I see the dominion covenant as undergirding all four oath-bound covenants. In the Old Covenant, it was more obviously familistic and tribal. In the New Covenant, it is more openly ecclesiastical. This is because the church is the new family of God. The Gospel breaks apart the unanimous confession of the Mosaic family covenant (Matt. 10). But, ultimately, the dominion covenant defines man as God's agent in history who must subdue the earth representatively on God's behalf. The dominion covenant was sworn representatively by the persons of the Godhead on behalf of mankind: "Let us make man in our image." This was the original covenant—prior to church, family, or state. Men may seek to substitute other gods, but in the final analysis, there are only two: God and Mammon.

1

STONES INTO BREAD: POWER RELIGION

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

MATTHEW 4:1–4

The theocentric principle of this law is the centrality of the law of God in man's life. This is point three of the biblical covenant: law.[1]

A. The Wilderness Experience

The story of the wilderness temptation appears in two of the four Gospels: Matthew and Luke. This event was a recapitulation of the temptation in the garden. But there were differences. First, Jesus was not in the midst of plenty. Second, He was suffering from hunger. Adam had labored under neither of these burdens. There was a third important difference: there was no intermediary tempter. This time, Satan did not use a serpent as his covenantal agent, nor was there a woman involved. He approached Jesus directly. In short, Jesus was tempted under especially difficult circumstances.

The issues were these: Whose word should man use to help him set his priorities? Was the priority of immediate gratification worth the act of transforming stones into bread? Or was there a higher pri-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

ority? What is the main source of man's satisfaction: earthly assets or the word of God? Here Jesus gave us the answer: God's word. Our desires in life must be met by relying on God's word, not by relying on whatever we own or whatever we can obtain on our own authority. *The ultimate source of treasure in life is God's word.*

In this first temptation, the devil did not ask Jesus to do anything inherently wrong. Jesus subsequently used His supernatural power to turn a few loaves of bread and a few fishes into a meal that fed thousands (Matt. 14:21). Then He did it again (Matt. 15:38). Why did the devil use this temptation to begin the series? It was a matter of historical context. The question before Jesus was the question of causation. Which is more fundamental, power or obedience? Jesus made it plain: obedience. The word of God is superior to autonomous power. It is also superior to a man's temporary desires. By appealing to the Bible, Jesus made it plain that He would not sacrifice law to expedient power.

The context of Jesus' scriptural citation was the wilderness experience of the Israelites. Moses recounted to the conquest generation the miracles of God in sustaining the people in the wilderness for four decades. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. 8:3).[2] That is, God had granted them a miracle—manna—which they made into bread. The manna had demonstrated God's power over nature and history. It also demonstrated His grace to His people.[3] They could trust Him to sustain them. In the future, they would need bread, but they had needed it in the wilderness, too, and God had supplied it supernaturally.

God had made it plain to them: He is sovereign over history. He had given them His law at Sinai.[4] His law is sovereign over history. To gain the blessings of God in history, men must obey His law (Deut. 28:1–14).[5] What sustains man in history is God's specially revealed word, which includes His specially revealed law.

The heart of the wilderness experience was not the manna or the

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy,* 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986).

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

clothes that did not wear out. The heart of that experience was the self-discipline of having faith in God. The transfer of authority from the exodus generation to the conquest generation came through the latter's experience of a daily miracle: manna. They had grown up in the context of miracles. But, upon entering the Promised Land, submitting to circumcision, and eating Passover, the Israelites were immediately cut off from the miracle of manna (Josh. 5:12). They would henceforth eat the fruit of the land. To remain in the land, they were required to obey God's revealed law (Deut. 8:19–20).[6]

Jesus reminded the devil of the requirement for maintaining the kingdom grant: obedience.[7] *Prosperity is not a matter of power; it is a matter of covenantal obedience*. His power over the stones was unquestioned. The devil did not suggest otherwise. In fact, the temptation rested on the presupposition that Jesus possessed such power. The nature of this temptation was an appeal to power. This was one more example of the power religion vs. the dominion religion.[8] Jesus refused to invoke power rather than ethics.

B. Miracles as Welfare[9]

The exodus from Egypt to Canaan is a model of the move from slavery to freedom. The model for a free society is not found in Israel's miraculous wilderness experience, where God gave them manna and removed many burdens of entropy.[10] The predictable miracles of the wilderness era were designed to humble the people before God: subordination. The wilderness experience was not marked by economic growth but by economic stagnation and men's total dependence on God. They were not allowed to save extra portions of manna, which rotted (Ex. 16:20). On the move continually, they could not dig wells, plant crops, or build houses. At best, they may have been able to increase their herds, as nomads do (Num. 3:45; 20:4; 32:1). The wilderness experience was a means of teaching them that God acts in history to sustain His people. The wilderness economy with its regular miracles was not to become an ideal toward which covenant-keepers should strive. Israel longed for escape from the wilderness. It was

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.
7. *Ibid.*, ch. 17:C.
8. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Part 1, *Representation and Dominion*, pp. 1–3.
9. This section appeared originally in North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21:B.
10. On entropy, an aspect of the second law of thermodynamics, see Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988).

God's curse on the exodus generation that they would die in the wilderness with full stomachs and like-new clothes.

The wilderness economy was a welfare economy. The Israelites were supplied with basic necessities even though the people did not work. But they lacked variety. People without the ability to feed themselves were fed by God: same old diet. People without the ability to clothe themselves were clothed by God: same old fashions. Israel wandered aimlessly because the nation had refused to march into war against Canaan (Num. 14). They were not fit to lead; so, they had to follow. They were welfare clients; they had no authority over the conditions of their existence. They took what was handed out to them. As is so often the case with welfare clients in general, they constantly complained that their lifestyle just wasn't good enough (Num. 11). They had been unwilling to pay the price of freedom: conquest. God therefore cursed them to endure four decades of welfare economics. The only good thing about the wilderness welfare program was that it did not use the state as the agency of positive blessings. No one was coerced into paying for anyone else's lifestyle. God used a continuous series of miracles to sustain them all. There was no coercive program of wealth redistribution. Israel in the wilderness was a welfare society, not a welfare state.

The lure of the welfare state remains with responsibility-avoiding men in every era. It was this lure which attracted the crowds to Jesus. "Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (John 6:26). They wanted a king who would feed them. They viewed Jesus as a potential candidate for king because He could multiply bread. They associated free food with political authority, which was the same presumption that the urban proletariat in Rome was making. If accommodated, this outlook would end in political tyranny and national bankruptcy. Jesus knew this, so He departed from them (John 6:11–15).

Men in their rebellion against God want to believe in a state that can heal them. They believe in *salvation by law*—civil law. They prefer to live under the authority of a messianic state, meaning a healer state, rather than under freedom. They want to escape the burdens of personal and family responsibility in this world of cursed scarcity. They want to live as children live, as recipients of bounty without a price tag. They are willing to sacrifice their liberty and the liberty of others in order to attain this goal.

One mark of spiritual immaturity is the quest for economic miracles: stones into bread. The price of this alchemical wealth is always the same: acceptance of magic. Modern welfare economics teaches that the state can provide such miracles through positive economic policy, i.e., by taking wealth from some and transferring it to others, either directly or through monetary inflation. This belief is the presupposition of the Keynesian revolution, which dominated twentieth-century economic thought after 1950. The self-taught economist (B.A. in mathematics) John Maynard Keynes actually described credit expansion—the heart of his economic system—as the "miracle . . . of turning a stone into bread."[11]

When Israel crossed into the Promised Land, the identifying marks of their wilderness subordination were removed by God: the manna and their permanent clothing. *This annulment of the welfare economy was necessary for their spiritual maturation and their liberation*. The marks of their subordination to God would henceforth be primarily confessional and ethical, beginning with circumcision (Josh. 5:8). The only food miracle that would remain in Israel would be a triple crop two years prior to a jubilee (Lev. 25:21). God promised to substitute a new means of Israel's preservation: economic growth. No longer would they be confined to manna and the same old clothing. Now they would be able to multiply their wealth. The zero-growth world of the welfare society would be replaced by the pro-growth world of covenantal remembrance.

C. Something for Nothing

The devil offered Jesus a familiar temptation: something for nothing. Jesus could easily have taken something common and without economic value and converted it into something valuable. A stone was a common item in the wilderness. It commanded no price. There were more stones available at zero price than there was demand for them. Not so with bread. Bread commanded a price. For a hungry man with money to spend, bread commands a high price if there is only one seller. In the wilderness, Jesus was hungry. He presumably would have paid for bread, but either there was no nearby seller or He had no money. How would He relieve His hunger?

11. Keynes (anonymous), *Paper of the British Experts* (April 8, 1943), cited in Ludwig von Mises, "Stones into Bread, the Keynesian Miracle," *Plain Talk* (1948), reprinted in Henry Hazlitt (ed.), *The Critics of Keynesian Economics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1960), p. 306.

The answer was obvious to the supreme master of the power religion: convert stones into bread. Say the word, and it would be done, Satan told Jesus. Just say the word. Invoke power. But under these circumstances, this would not be power from above; it would be power from below.[12] Why? Because of the context of the temptation. This was a recapitulation of the setting of the Fall of man. Adam had the power to eat the forbidden fruit, but he lacked the lawful authority to do so. Jesus had the power to turn stones into bread; like Adam, He also lacked the lawful authority to do so. Why? Was He not God? Yes, but He was also man. He was under authority. This authority was judicial. He was under the word of God, the authority over man.

Satan was suggesting a shortcut to satisfaction: no work, no payment of money, no delayed gratification. All it would cost was . . . what? A return to the welfare society of the wilderness. The Israelites had been sustained miraculously, but they had no other way to survive. The wilderness could not sustain them. Miracles could. To gain wealth in the Promised Land, they were required to work (Deut. 8:10). The miracle of the manna had ceased. The mature way to wealth is through sacrifice of present consumption for the sake of future income: thrift. The devil was offering Jesus miracles in the wilderness as a way of life. This meant leaving the devil in control of society through his disciples: the power religion. There would be no righteous conquest through covenant-keeping. All Jesus had to do was formalize the power religion to satisfy his hunger. He refused.

What is the basis of life? God's grace. It is an unmerited gift.[13] Grace precedes law. But law always follows grace. Man maintains his grant from God through obedience to God.[14] This ability to obey is also a form of grace. The basis of the church's extension of God's kingdom in history is the grace of God through the predictability of His sanctions. Obedience to the word of God is the basis of wealth. Anything that detracts from this social cause-and-effect relationship should not be trusted.

God's grace is unearned by its recipients. They gain something for nothing. Jesus paid something; men receive it for nothing. *Because all life rests on grace, the concept of something for nothing is inherent in creation*. The sun, moon, and stars were made for man (Gen. 1:14–17).

12. R. J. Rushdoony, "Power from Below," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, I (Summer, 1975).

13. The gift is unmerited by fallen man. It is merited by the perfect life of Jesus Christ in history.

14. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 17:C.

But, ever since the Fall of man, there has always been a price required by God for every benefit enjoyed by any creature: *the death of an acceptable sacrifice*. God has a doctrine of something for nothing: grace grounded in a substitutionary atonement. The devil was asking Jesus to substitute his version of something for nothing in place of God's version. Yet Satan's offer was and is an illusion: a price must be paid for whatever men receive from him. Satan is no less a recipient of God's common grace than man. He does not deserve life, power, or time, but God grants these gifts to him. He owns nothing on his own; God supplies him with everything.[15] So, the person who believes in Satan's version of something for nothing—the invocation of supernatural power to achieve man's autonomous ends—has become his servant. His servants will pay the price in eternity.

D. Living by God's Word

The devil asked Jesus to substitute power religion for dominion religion. Just say the word, he suggested. But the word that counts most is God's word, not man's word, Jesus replied. As a creature who is dependent on the creation, man lives by bread, but not by bread alone. He lives by God's word. *This is a denial of the twin doctrines of common grace and natural law as stand-alone principles of social order*. Man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Modern man wants to find laws that operate autonomously from God's word. Modern economics is a self-conscious attempt to reason about social cause and effect without any appeal to morality or the supernatural. But such an attempt is an illusion; it always imports values through the back door. Specifically, in order to justify public policies by means of an appeal to economic science, economists pretend that political representatives can make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of other individuals' subjective utility, as if there were a common value scale across independent, autonomous people. But no such value scale exists.[16]

Similarly, in political theory, some men still appeal to Stoic principles of natural law and natural morality. The state is supposedly not to invoke God's word as the basis of legislation and judicial deci-

15. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 2.

16. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5; North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix H.

sion-making. The natural law theorist insists that man can live apart from every word that proceeds from God's special revelation. Not only can man do so, he must do so. Any appeal to the Bible as a standard above the common reason of all mankind is said to be an illegitimate appeal.[17]

To invoke a hypothetical common moral reasoning process, let alone agreed-upon logical conclusions, of covenant-breaking man, is comparable to commanding stones into bread. Modern man believes in stones into bread on this basis: a world not under God's Bible-revealed law. He wants his daily bread only on these terms. Jesus announced that man does not live by bread alone. This means that man cannot live by his own word. Any appeal to man and man's wisdom as the source of bread is an illegitimate appeal. Eventually, such an appeal will produce hunger in history and terror in eternity.

Conclusion

Jesus here denied the validity of power religion in its supernatural form: *magic*. But, by appealing to the word of God, He also denied power religion in its natural form: *autonomy*. Man lives by bread, but also by every word that God has uttered. God's word is the supreme form of wealth. It is intangible wealth. It is more fundamental than tangible wealth, even bread in the life of a hungry person. When man forgets this, he eventually suffers the consequences in history and eternity.

This passage does not dismiss bread as irrelevant. On the contrary, bread is said to be a source of life. Jesus referred to Himself as the bread of life (John 6:35, 48). But the word of God is superior to bread as a source of life. It was not bread that had sustained Jesus in the wilderness; it was God's word, which He proved by using it against

17. Wrote Norman Geisler, a premillennial follower of Thomas Aquinas: "The cry to return to our Christian roots is seriously misguided if it means that government should favor Christian teachings. . . . First, to establish such a Bible-based civil government would be a violation of the First Amendment. Even mandating the Ten Commandments would favor certain religions. . . . Furthermore, the reinstitution of the Old Testament legal system is contrary to New Testament teaching. Paul says clearly that Christians 'are not under the law, but under grace' (Rom. 6:14). . . . The Bible may be informative, but it is not normative for civil law." Norman L. Geisler, "Should We Legislate Morality?" *Fundamentalist Journal* (July/Aug. 1988),p. 17. He continued: "What kind of laws should be used to accomplish this: Christian laws or Humanistic laws? Neither. Rather, they should simply be just laws. Laws should not be either Christian or anti-Christian; they should be merely fair ones." *Ibid*., p. 64. For my response, see North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 66:I.

Satan. This passage places bread in subordination to word. It therefore places tangible wealth in subordination to the intangible wealth of God's verbal revelation.

Jesus invoked God's word to defeat Satan, who suggested a way to eat bread without a recipe (planning), grain, or labor: something for nothing. Jesus rejected this religion of magic. He proclaimed a religion of faith and ethics, word and deed. To live biblically means to obey God. This is the basis of true wealth in its broadest meaning.

The top priority here is the substitution of covenantal faithfulness for power. Obedience is primary; positive sanctions in history are secondary. The lawful means of gaining what we need and want is our reliance on God's word. In economic theory, this means the rejection of all explanations of national wealth that are based on an appeal to the productivity of autonomous, God-ignoring schemes or philosophies. This outlook rejects the humanist ideal of the state as a healer, and also the libertarian ideal of the state as a morally neutral night watchman.

2

RISK-FREE LIVING: POWER RELIGION

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

MATTHEW 4:5–7

The theocentric principle of this law is God as the deliverer: point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Tempting God

This is the second wilderness temptation in Matthew. It is the third in Luke's Gospel. I think the chronological sequence in Matthew is more likely. The temptation began with tempting Christ's to resort to magic: stones into bread. The second was God's to invoke deliverance of Him by way of angels. The third was open worship of Satan: the heart of the matter.

The offer here was risk-free living. This is a long-desired goal for man. It cannot be attained in this life, but risk-reduction is a universal practice. The modern science of statistics was initially developed by men who were seeking to lower their risk.[2] Risk-reduction does not come at zero price. The question is: How high a price? What was Satan asking Jesus to exchange in order to demonstrate His legal claim

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. Peter Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

to this promise? What was this demonstration worth to Jesus? Did Jesus even possess such a legal claim to this promise? If He did, why did He surrender it here?

Jesus answered the devil in the first temptation by an appeal to the Bible, i.e., the word of God. Having allowed the text of the Bible to establish this principle of authority, He cited the Bible again: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The full text of the verse throws light on the context. "Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah" (Deut. 6:16). The context of the Israelites' infraction was their cry for water in the wilderness, and their accusation that God had to prove Himself by the provision of water.

> And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not? (Ex. 17:1–7)

God provided them with water. Moses struck the rock, and water flowed out of it. This was a demonstration of God's power. But it was a demonstration that condemned them to second-class citizenship. They became psychologically dependent on repeated supernatural displays of God's power over nature. They did not learn to trust His covenant law. They learned to complain again and again, whining for their desires. "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:16). They never grew up. Even Moses was later snared by their commitment to magic as a way of life. He struck the other rock twice to draw water out of it, despite the fact that God had told him to speak to the rock, not strike it (Num. 20:10–12). He used ritual instead of relying on God's word—the essence of magic.[3]

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed.

B. To Protect the Messiah

The devil cited a portion of Psalm 91.[4] This is sometimes regarded as a messianic psalm. It refers to long life for the person spoken of. But long life was what was *not* granted to the Messiah in his role as redeemer. Jesus died young. How could this passage have applied to Him? "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. **With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation**" (Ps. 91:10–16).

1. A Suffering Messiah

Satan cited a verse which, if applied literally to Jesus, would have meant that He could not serve as the Passover's sacrificial lamb, a young sacrifice. The Mosaic Covenant's sacrificial animals were young.[5] If this passage applied literally to Jesus in His pre-resurrection phase, then it meant that the world would not have a savior. He would survive the fall from the temple, but mankind would not survive a Messiah blessed with longevity. Israel might gain a long-lived king; it would not gain a savior.

The difficulty in interpreting this prophecy as messianic is the opposite message in a crucial messianic prophecy, a prophecy of substitutionary atonement.

> Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 11.

4. Luke's citation is from the Septuagint, Psalm 90:11, 12. See William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 238.

5. Leviticus 1:14; Numbers 28:19; Numbers 29:13; Luke 2:24.

> our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:1–12).

If this applied to Jesus, then the prophecy in Psalm 91 either did not apply to Jesus in His office as Messiah, or else it applied as an inheritance that He abandoned. The question is, if the passage in Psalm 91 did not apply to Jesus, to whom did it apply? No one in Old Covenant history claimed it as his own. If not Jesus, then who? I conclude that this psalm offered this set of unique conditions to Jesus, but He refused to claim the inheritance as His. He refused it here, and in response, God the Father refused to honor it on Calvary. On the cross, Jesus called out to God: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46b). God remained silent. Yet the passage affirms: "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation" (Ps. 91:14–16). This promise was no longer in force. Why not? Because Jesus forfeited any claim to it by fulfilling the role of the suffering Messiah. So, the psalm was not messianic.

2. A Leap of Faith

Satan proposed a test. If Jesus failed it, there would be no substitutionary sacrifice, no execution. There would only be a dead body on the ground. On the other hand, if Jesus survived, then He was a premature heir to this promise, and therefore He could not be the proph-

esied lamb led to the slaughter. It was a lose-lose situation for Jesus, and a win-win offer for Satan. Jesus declined to accept the challenge.

Jesus cited the law against tempting God. Yet Gideon had doubted and had proposed a pair of tests involving a fleece (Jud. 6:37–40). What is wrong with such demonstrations of God's intentions? Nothing, just so long as the information desired has not been revealed authoritatively in the Bible. Gideon had no way to be sure that he was speaking to a representative of God. There was no written revelation that applied to his situation. Not so with Jesus. He knew that the verse cited was applicable to Him, but only as a statement of the protection available to Him, not as a prophecy the actual details of His life. He was not going to prove its applicability in a way that might produce His immediate death or validate His non-messianic long life. Neither result was appropriate for His work on earth.

The reason why this leap of faith would have constituted the tempting of God was because such a life-or-death test was imposed by man on his own authority. The Israelites had made this mistake: "Is God with us?" they had asked. "Let him prove it by offering us life-sustaining water." But God had already done so: at the Red Sea. The life-sustaining water for Israel was the death-inducing water for Egypt. They had seen this miracle, but it no longer made any impression on them. They required another test. And another. There would be no end to the required tests if the Israelites of the exodus had anything to say about it.

Their addiction to miracles was very great. It was part of their slave's mentality. The slave relies on someone else to sustain him with capital. He is not ready to become an independent person. The exodus generation had not been willing to accept the responsibility of war against Canaan (Num. 14). They had to wander for a generation until they died off.

Jesus was not addicted to miracles for His own sake. He provided them for Israel's sake. He used them to establish a covenant lawsuit against Israel. "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:23–24). That generation would die in its sins as surely as the exodus generation had.[6]

6. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

C. Life Has Risks

Life has risks. We dash our feet against stones. We slip and fall. Because of sin, we suffer the negative sanctions of pain and failure. We suffer death. In this sense, we live a high-risk existence.

Satan was offering Jesus risk-free living. For the Messiah, such risk-free living would mean the death of man. The Messiah was to experience separation from God on behalf of man—the ultimate risk. For Him, there was no escape, so that for His people there is an escape. There was no way that Jesus could live risk-free and still perform His work as redeemer.

Men want to lower their risks. This is legitimate, in the same sense that seeking to lower any of our costs is legitimate. But to seek risk-free living is to seek slavery and death. It is comparable to seeking cost-free living. Such a quest is demonic in history: the overcoming of sin's curse without overcoming sin.

The most successful technical means of reducing risk is economic growth. We gain more wealth, which can be used to shield us from unpleasant events. Then there is the discovery of the laws of mathematical probability.[7] This has greatly reduced risk. But no means of risk reduction should be elevated above God's offer of protection: not insurance, not wealth, not power. Any rival source of risk reduction will eventually be worshiped by man. It will then demand sacrifice.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a vast bureaucracy was created by law that seeks to reduce risks for all people under the jurisdiction of the state. But risks must be borne by someone. The cost of paying for unforeseen negative events must be borne by someone. Increasingly, the state insists that it will pay for the errors of men. The state imposes taxes on the successful in order to compensate those who have failed. This is not an insurance transaction in which men contract with each other through a third party to insure against statistically predictable losses. It is not a transaction based on a cost-benefit estimation of those who are asked to pay. The costs are imposed by coercion on those who do not posses effective political influence.

This coercive wealth redistribution policy raises costs. Employers bear a heavy load of responsibility in the government's many systems of risk reduction. So, employers seek out employees who are less likely to be injured, fail, or in other ways cost the employer extra

7. Bernstein, *Against the Gods*.

money. Those who are required to pay seek ways of excluding from the arrangement those who are statistically more likely to be paid.

The modern administrative law order has extended the definition of social risk and has extended its net to haul in more people to bear such risk. Men seek to be protected by the state's many economic safety nets, yet they also seek to escape the nets tossed out to entrap those with capital. The end of such a game of hide and seek is sure: the increase in the number of those who are promised safety and the loss of freedom for those who are required to pay. At some point, the safety net will break, breaking men's faith in the state, and breaking the state's nets of entrapment. When this happens, all those who are dependent on the broken safety nets will find themselves weak and defenseless against social change. The very collapse of the nets will accelerate social change, increasing risks for all.

Conclusion

The Messiah had to bear risks. The messianic state must also bear risks. The Messiah did not attempt to test the existence of a safety net from God. He bore His own risks and ours as well.

The messianic state seeks to transfer risks to taxpayers and others with capital. The result will be an unprecedented disaster. Hundreds of millions of people have been lured into one or another of the state's safety nets. When these nets break, those caught inside them will have a great fall.

The top priority of this passage is to live by God's word, but not by expectations of abnormal supernatural intervention. A religion of risk-defying acts in defiance of God's law is a religion of magic. Biblical religion is not magical. It does not rely on man-invoked supernatural miracles to enable man to achieve the good life. It also does not invoke the state as a provider of safety nets against the economic results of either risk-avoiding failure[8] or needlessly risky foolishness.

8. The parable of the talents: the man who buried his (Matt. 25:18). See Chapter 47.

3

THE KINGDOMS OF MAN: POWER RELIGION

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

MATTHEW 4:8–10

The theocentric principle of this law is the absolute sovereignty of God: point one of the biblical covenant.[1] He is not to be trifled with for man's purposes. He is not to be called to account by man—the message of the book of Job.[2]

The choice here was obvious: the kingdom of God vs. the kingdoms of man. The test involved an assessment of costs and benefits. A present-oriented power-seeker would have picked the kingdoms of man. Jesus did not choose this. We can infer several reasons for this refusal.

A. Who Owns the Earth?

This is the third wilderness temptation in Matthew. It is the second in Luke's Gospel. I believe the account in Matthew is chronologically more likely. It ends with Satan's offer of all of man's kingdoms. This seems to be the culminating offer available to Satan.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

It is obvious that this vision of the kingdoms of man was no earthly vision. The earth is a globe. There is no earthly mountain that allows you to view all of man's kingdoms at one time. This was a representative mountain, the pinnacle of man. It was what the Tower of Babel was meant to be: "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4).

This was a place where man would imitate God, viewing his kingdoms.

On what legal basis did Satan make this offer? None. It was a lie. He did not possess either the power or the authority to reward Jesus for worshipping him. He did not possess such power, for he is a creature under God. He did not possess such authority, because he is in rebellion.

Then why is Satan described as the prince of this world (John 12:31; Eph. 2:2)? Because mankind transferred covenantal allegiance to him through Adam. Adam surrendered allegiance to God and substituted allegiance to his own judgment. But in doing so, he merely substituted the worship of Satan for the worship of God. Adam was in a position to choose whose word he would accept: God's or the serpent's. He was never in a position to establish himself as lord of creation. God alone has this authority. To imagine that man possesses it is to substitute foolishness for wisdom. It is to worship power rather than lawful authority. But Satan possesses more power than man. Man will lose this contest. Power religion is Satan's religion. Man cannot come out on top in this religion.

Because God delegated authority to man, Adam possessed the ability to switch his allegiance. In doing so, he came under the dominion of sin. Sin now rules man. Satan and his fallen cohorts exercise power from time to time, but man's sin is their avenue to power in history. This is why Paul wrote: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:12–14). This describes a spiritual war. It is a spiritual war fought on the battleground of ethics. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against pow-

ers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

So, when Satan offered the kingdoms of man to Jesus, he was offering to give to the last Adam (I Cor. 15:45) what the first Adam had surrendered to him. If Jesus had accepted the offer, He would have recapitulated the Fall. This offer was a variation of the serpent's original offer: to render unto Satan what belongs to God. The worship of Satan was implicit in man's acceptance of the truth of the offer, both in the garden and on the mountain. In the name of man's sovereignty, Satan lured Adam into subordination to him. He tried this again with Jesus.

B. No Other God

Jesus' answer was clear: only God may be lawfully worshipped. The kingdoms of man must be formally restored to their previous legal condition: a unified kingdom of God. There is one God, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5). There is therefore only one legitimate kingdom in history. Any man who seeks to exercise sovereignty over all the kingdoms of man is calling for unification of these kingdoms under himself. He has fallen for the old lure, "ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5).

Jesus had come to restore covenantal unity to the kingdoms of man: *a unity of confession*. He was God's agent in this restoration. His was the kingdom prophesied by Daniel. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). Any man who would challenge the establishment of God's kingdom in history would be wise to heed Daniel's warning to Nebuchadnezzar: "That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan. 4:25).

There is no other God. There is no other permanent kingdom. But there are pretender gods. There are pretender kingdoms. Satan was a pretender god offering Jesus pretender kingdoms. Jesus did not accept the offer, for He knew the truth: there is no other God but God. Satan could not deliver on his promise.

C. The Lure of a Kingdom

In a frequently quoted but rarely believed passage, Jesus warned, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). Men build sand castles and call them kingdoms. These may be large sand castles or more modest ones. But their fate is the same: to be washed away (Matt. 7:25–27).

This warning was not given only to that handful of men in history who believe they are in a position to build a kingdom. It was given to every man who believes that he can construct walls around his life that cannot be penetrated by his enemies. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11). The only possessions that are guaranteed to stand the test of time are stored outside of time. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:20–21).[3]

Satan's offer of all the kingdoms of this world was a last, desperate attempt to retain his power. This was his third appeal to a man who had previously refused to invoke magic to feed himself, and had also refused to invoke the Bible to gain risk-free living. What else was left? The lure of a universal kingdom: the desire to make a name for oneself. If this temptation failed, Satan would be out of relevant temptations. It failed.

This temptation has been used again and again in history to lure men to destruction. In the twentieth century, Hitler, Stalin, and Mao all sought to build permanent kingdoms, and all failed.[4] The kingdoms of man all suffer the same fate: to be swallowed up by time.

Satan's lure is a powerful one. Arrogant men build political kingdoms in confidence. Fearful men build economic kingdoms because they know no other way. The effort in both cases is futile. Economic kingdom-builders are afflicted by a kind of madness. "A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil

3. Chapter 13.

4. Hitler's promised thousand-year reich lasted from 1933 to 1945. Stalin's kingdom lasted from his access to power 1928 to its collapse under Gorbachev in 1991. Mao's still exists in name and as a military force, but his successor, Deng, allowed the peasants of Red China to adopt capitalist ownership in 1979. Private ownership of the means of production spread rapidly through the Chinese economy. So did an economic boom. So has the Christian church.

disease" (Eccl. 6:2). The rich man builds up an inheritance for others. He cannot control what his heirs will do with this accumulated wealth.

D. Wealth, Safety, and Power

The first temptation had to do with the creation of wealth. If man can take stones and turn them into bread, he escapes the curse of nature. He returns to the garden of Eden on his own authority, on his own terms. The second temptation offered life without the risk of pain. Man escapes another curse of nature. If he then rules over all of men's kingdoms, he replaces God. He imposes curses and blessings as a sovereign.

The first temptation offered pure autonomy to Jesus: on His own authority, to turn stones into bread. The second asked Him to acknowledge His physical subordination to God and the angels, but not His ethical subordination: forfeiting His messianic redemptive assignment. The third got to the covenantal point: His worship of Satan. The previous temptations had sought to lure Him away indirectly from the worship of God. This one called Him to break covenant with God openly.

The first temptation involved the sin of magic. The second was ethical: tempting God. The third was political. The first two offered to place Jesus outside of nature's constraints. The third offered to place Him outside of history's constraints. All three offered Him below-market costs of living. Food, safety, and power could be His for the asking. But there is never something for nothing outside of God's grace. There was an implied exchange: the surrender of Jesus' soul. This exchange is always a bad bargain. The hidden costs are eternal.

Why did Satan believe that Jesus might fall for one of these temptations? Did he believe that Jesus' perfection was vulnerable? He must have. He understood that Jesus was a representative of the race of man. He believed that he had an opportunity to lure Jesus into a recapitulation of the Fall of man: the acceptance of power religion. Satan has great faith in power. These were the lures that tempted him. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa.

14:12–14). This was Isaiah's warning to Babylon (Isa. 13:19). But to warn Babylon, he invoked the imagery of the archetype of all political kingdom-building: Satan's rebellion. I conclude that Satan must view God's exercise of power as power for power's sake, not as extensions of God's character. He is himself blinded ethically by the lure of power. Satan's religion is the power religion.

Conclusion

Jesus did not substitute allegiance to Satan for allegiance to God. He understood the fundamental principle of biblical religion: man's covenantal subordination to God. Man is under God (Gen. 1:26–28). He is required to honor God by worshipping Him as the sovereign Creator. Jesus refused to break covenant with God by adopting either magic or empire-building politics, which are forms of the power religion. He recognized the hidden costs of the power religion: the loss of one's soul. Power religion publicly offers something for nothing. In fact, it demands something supremely valuable (eternal soul) for something far less valuable (temporary power). *Power religion is ultimately a religion of nothing for something*. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. 13:12).[5]

Our priority as covenant-keepers is to affirm the kingdom of God by shunning the kingdoms of man. We must seek to transform man's kingdoms through evangelism. This is not a call to pietistic withdrawal from social involvement. On the contrary, it is a call to worldwide dominion in history—a dominion guaranteed by Christ for His people.[6]

5. Chapter 27.

6. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997).

4

MEEKNESS AND INHERITANCE

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

MATTHEW 5:5

The theocentric focus of this passage cannot be meekness as such, for God is not meek. What, then? It has to be meekness before God. Humanist theologian John C. Raines has written of Calvin: "Calvin understood the Christian life not as 'a vessel filled with God' but as an active 'tool and instrument' of the Divine initiative. But this is precisely our point. Active toward the world, the Christian knows himself as utterly passive and obedient toward God, whose Will it is his sole task to discover and obey."[1] This is the heart of the matter: subordination under God and His law: hierarchy.[2] Dominion is by covenant. The result is inheritance: point five.[3]

Inheritance is a blessing. Inheriting the earth is a very large blessing. It has to be corporate. It has to be ecclesiastical. It is the people of God, members of the church, who inherit. The issue here is historical. Is this inheritance historical? Or is it confined to the post-resurrection world, after Satan and his angels have been consigned to the lake of fire? Subordination is surely historical. What about inheritance?

1. John C. Raines, "From Passive to Active Man: Reflections on the Revolution in Consciousness in Modern Man," in Raines and Thomas Dean (eds.), *Marxism and Radical Religion: Essays Toward a Revolutionary Humanism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1970), p. 114.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

3. Sutton, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

A. Subordination to Unrighteous Men

The passage that we call Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was delivered to an assembly of Jews who were living under Roman rule. Jews had not lived under their own kings for over half a millennium. What they knew was political weakness. They had learned how to survive as subordinates to foreign rulers.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was filled with the imagery of pain and weakness. The beatitudes—"blessed are the. . . ."—were a series of contrasts between the pain of the present and hope for the future. This future was earthly as well as heavenly. The phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," in Matthew was used as a synonym for the kingdom of God, which was not confined to the realm of departed spirits or the post-resurrection world. The promise of earthly inheritance had been placed by God before Israel for fourteen centuries. It was a kingdom promise. They would not have imagined that the following referred exclusively to the post-resurrection world: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:3–12).

The contrast here was between life under unjust men and life under God's rule. Injustice must be borne patiently, but life on earth need not be forever unjust. The promise of a world to inherit made it clear that there is hope for the Christian in his work. The contrast between the present and eternity appears only in the final verse, which deals with persecution by Jews. The persecution of the prophets had been a continual problem in the Promised Land, which was one reason why Israel was living under Roman rule. God had applied sanctions to the nation for this transgression of His law: the law of false witness. Israel had killed the true prophets and had honored the court prophets.

Matthew 5:5 is not confined exclusively to Israel. Its offer of earthly hope is valid in every age in which Christians suffer because

of their faith. The kingdom of heaven is not an exclusively Jewish phenomenon.[4] But the focus of the passage is on the contrast between times of suffering and a future era of victory. Compared to the promised future blessings, the suffering of God's people is a minor affair. It is also temporary.

B. Under God, Over the Creation

Matthew 5:5 is an extension of the dominion covenant: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26–28).[5] Man was created by God to extend His kingdom on earth. Man is God's agent in history. He is under God and over the creation.

Matthew 5:5 should not be interpreted in terms of a personality trait. It is not a statement that identifies a group of people who share this trait as those best equipped to run the world. *Biblical meekness is a matter of law*. The people who will inherit the earth are those who acknowledge themselves as subordinates to God and His law, and who use their knowledge of His law to subdue the earth to God's glory. Biblical meekness is correctly understood in relation to Jesus Christ: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29).[6] Just as Christ acknowledged His subordination to God the Father, so are we to take Christ's yoke and imitate Him. Our position as covenantal subordinates to a sovereign God is supposed to create in us an appropriate sense of inner peace: "But let it be the hidden man of the heart,

4. Traditional dispensationalism drew a sharp contrast between the kingdom of heaven in Matthew and the kingdom of God in the other gospels. The kingdom of heaven supposedly referred only to Israel before Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70 and to a future millennial era after Jesus returns in person to set up an earthly kingdom. This contrast has faded in the writings of dispensationalists ever since the publication of the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

6. Chapter 25.

in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (I Pet. 3:4).

Jesus was not meek when He twice used a whip to drive the moneychangers out of the temple area, at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:15) and at the end (Matt. 21:12).[7] There was nothing meek about His use of pejorative language against His opponents: hypocrites (Matt. 15:7), whited sepulchres (Matt. 23:27), serpents, generation of vipers (Matt. 23:33), thieves (Mark 11:17), sons of the devil (John 8:44). Jesus' rhetoric was inflammatory. He did not hold back verbally in His rejection of the rabbis' authority over Him. On what basis could He have lawfully used such language against the religious rulers of Israel? Only on the basis of His office as the judge of Israel. He was in authority over them because He obeyed His Father perfectly. When they tried to silence Him, He spoke out in public. When they told Him to speak, He remained silent (Matt. 27:12). He was not meek before them; He was a thorn in their flesh, challenging their ethics and their willingness to teach the truth about the Bible.

C. Under the Creation, Over God

The covenant-breaker worships idols. Schlossberg calls these idols of nature and idols of history.[8] Ancient man believed in local spirits that exercised rule over him. Modern man believes instead in impersonal forces that exercise rule over him: meaningless, purposeless forces. Or he may trust in impersonal chance or impersonal fate, just as classical man did.[9] He fears the state, just as classical man did,[10] for it is the most powerful institution that man lives under. In all of these cases, he does not worship a God who created everything out of nothing by the power of His word. The god of covenant-breaking man always shares power with the creation. To the extent that mankind can gain power over the creation, man becomes co-regent with this god.

Man seeks to worship a god with enough power to assist him in his quest to gain power. But this god is not to be so powerful that he lays down the law to man. Some law, yes, but not comprehensive law.

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7. Chapter 42.

8. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 11.

9. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1944] 1957), p. 159.

10. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy*, 2nd ed. (Vallecito, California [1971] 2007), chaps. 2, 3.

Man is therefore willing to subordinate himself to nature in order to escape complete subordination to God. He invents gods of nature in order to escape the God who created nature. Paul wrote:

> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:18–23).[11]

One of the themes of modern evolutionary humanism is that man is a destroyer of nature. He is a polluter who seeks his own ends at the expense of nature, which deserves respect as an equal, if not a superior. The ecology movement is a reaction to society's perceived exploitation of nature. The "deep ecology" movement, while tiny, is dedicated to the proposition that modern society is evil because it refuses to become subordinate to the forces of nature. Man is not supposed to use science to extract from nature the resources necessary to sustain a middle-class lifestyle for large numbers of people. The deep ecologists correctly observe that man in his self-proclaimed autonomy is a destroyer. But their answer is not to recommend placing man and society under God through the four oath-bound covenants—personal, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil—but to place mankind under an implicit covenant with nature. In some cases, nature is seen as alive, having a hidden agenda. "Mother nature" is seen as more than a phrase; it is seen as a personal force. This borders on nature worship and animism—a very ancient religion. Sometimes it crosses the border.

When men subordinate themselves to any aspect of the creation, they become idolatrous. They seek both power and meaning apart from the God who created nature. They ignore the Bible as the source of law. They reject God's demand that man exercise dominion over nature. They reject the suggestion that man alone is made in God's

11. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

image, and that he possesses lawful authority over nature on this basis. In short, they place God in the dock and seek to bring a covenant lawsuit against God by bringing one against His people and His Bible.

D. Inheritance and Meekness

Inheritance is point five of the biblical covenant model. Deuteronomy is the book of the inheritance in the Pentateuch, and it is the fifth book in the Pentateuch.[12] It is also the book of God's law. "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 16:18–20).[13] The Psalms repeat this theme.[14]

> His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).
>
> For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).
>
> But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).
>
> For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).

Conclusion

Jesus here set forth a principle of Godly rule: meekness before God produces authority over creation. The hierarchy of authority from God to man to nature implies that man must be meek before God and confident before nature. Covenant-keeping men are to be confident in their prosecution of covenant lawsuits against God's enemies. They are not to be meek before the shepherds of the goats of this world. They are to be meek before the Shepherd whose voice they recognize (John 10).

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12. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 39.

14. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 2.

The promised reward for such behavior is the inheritance of the whole world, which is the judicial basis for the church's progressive working out of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28).[15] This will finally be accomplished after the final judgment, but there is *a down payment in history*: the New Heavens and New Earth.

> For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands (Isa. 65:17–22).[16]

15. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 4.

16. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 15; cf. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 5.

5

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

MATTHEW 5:13

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] "And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt" (Lev. 2:13). This is point two of the biblical covenant.

A. Salt and Sanctions

Salt is an aspect of covenant sanctions. Salt is a two-fold sanction: positive (flavor) and negative (permanent destruction). The parallel passage in Mark is even more terrifyingly explicit: "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another" (Mark 9:47–50).

Jesus here referred back to the offerings of the temple (Lev. 2:13).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Salt confirmed the Old Covenant: "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee" (Num. 18:19). How did salt confirm the Old Covenant? By being present in the burnt offerings, which were negative sanctions applied to dead animals rather than dead men. The salt provided savor; God then consumed these sacrifices. The imagery is that of a God who delights in the burning flesh of the damned. This is harsh imagery, which modern man rejects. Jesus did not reject it. To it He added the worm that refuses to die.

There is no question that salt in the Old Covenant was a testimony to God's covenant. It testified to the negative sanctions and the positive sanctions. The sanctions were positive for covenant-keepers, negative for covenant-breakers.

Jesus contrasted savory salt with tasteless salt. Tasteless salt is good for nothing but to be trodden down by men. It once was a source of savor; it becomes a means of destruction, just as it was in the ancient world. Salt was used to destroy the land's productivity: "And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt" (Jud. 9:45). In this sense, salt was a negative sanction of a covenant.

B. A Nation at Risk

Savorless salt: this is Jesus' description of covenant-keepers who cease doing God's work. They are fit for destruction as agents of destruction. They are cast out and walked over, driving them into the earth to destroy the earth's productivity. They become signs of God's wrath against hypocrisy. He uses them as a victorious ancient army used salt: to seal the cutting off of the enemy's future.

The context of Jesus' remarks was the nation of Israel. Israel was under negative sanctions: Roman rule. It had been under foreign rule since the captivity. Jesus was speaking to residents of a defeated nation. Israel was the salt that had lost its savor. It was fit for grinding underfoot. This grinding had already begun. In A.D. 70, the process was completed, judicially speaking,[2] although it took until the failure of Bar Kochba's two-year rebellion for the Romans to disperse the nation completely in A.D. 135. Jesus was warning the nation that

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

the day of judgment was coming. It was time to repent. The Sermon on the Mount was a call to repentance, to a new way of life. Those who were trodden down would rise up. Those who were being treated badly would see God: victory. There was hope available, but to claim it, men would have to become salt. They would have to add flavor to others' food. They would have to become a benefit to others.

Jesus was telling Jews that Israel was doomed. Their righteousness would have to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). Unless they became positive sanctions among men, they would become negative sanctions among men. They would be trodden down as examples. This, the Romans did a generation after Jesus spoke these words.

C. Good Works in the Salt Shaker

The heart of the matter was righteousness. The metaphor was savor.

1. Salt Is Good

Salt is good, Jesus said, but it must be salty. It must add flavor. When it ceases to be marked by flavor, it ceases to be useful as a positive force. It is then useful only as a negative force. Jesus went on to use another analogy: the candle under a bushel. "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14–16).[3] Salt without savor is analogous to a hidden light: useless.

The issue here is good works. Good works are the saltiness of holy salt, the brightness of light. Without these positive characteristics, salt and light are good for nothing, i.e., destructive. Good works performed by God's judicial representatives testify to His goodness. Bad works testify falsely to the true character of God. False witness is to be avoided. The negative sanction against false witness is the punishment that would have been applied to the victim. "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of

3. Chapter 6.

three witnesses, shall the matter be established. If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut. 19:15–21).[4] Therefore, the penalty for false witness against God is death, as Adam learned.[5]

2. Good Works Reflect God

Good works reflect God, who is the source of every good gift. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). Evil does not come out of good. Jesus said this repeatedly. "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 7:17–19).[6] "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt. 12:33). Christian commentators identify the corrupt tree as Israel, but Israel itself was an example of a more inclusive phenomenon: God's destruction of the unrighteous.

3. Covenant-Keepers

The person who identifies himself as a covenant-keeper must keep the laws of God (Matt. 5:17–18).[7] Israel's problem was not sin in gen-

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2012), Appendix E.

6. Chapter 18.

7. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985).

eral. That problem was what the gentile nations represented. Israel's problem was the visible discrepancy between its covenant standards and its behavior. That is, Israel's problem was visible unrighteousness in the name of righteousness, evil works in the name of good works. Israel as a nation was like the unclean man who drew near to the temple: the closer he came, the more dangerous was his unclean legal status. Eventually, he had to be stopped from drawing closer, or else God would destroy him. "And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?" (Num. 17:12–13). If many unclean people were allowed to draw near, God would depart from the temple. This was what took place a generation later, in A.D. 70.[8]

This is as true under the New Covenant as it was under the Mosaic Covenant. God brings negative sanctions against those who do evil in His name. But these verses indicate that more is required than merely avoiding evil. It is not sufficient to do no evil in God's name. Covenant-keepers must do good works. They must bring positive sanctions in history. To fail to do this is the judicial equivalent of doing evil. There is no neutrality. There are no neutral acts. This is the message of Matthew 25, which describes the final judgment.

> Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Matt. 25:41–46).

4. Good Works and Salvation

Then do good works save men? Absolutely. Without good works, men cannot enter heaven. Then is salvation by good works? Absolutely. James was explicit in this regard. "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there

8. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997).

is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:18–24).

The theological question is this: *What is the source of these good works?* The New Testament's answer is clear: the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Mosaic law perfectly. God imputes—declares judicially—Christ's comprehensive and representative good works to covenant-keepers at the moment of their conversion. As surely as Adam's sin is imputed judicially by God to all men who are devoid of saving grace,[9] so is Christ's righteousness imputed to covenant-keepers. The doctrine of imputation holds for both groups: covenant-breakers and covenant-keepers.[10] For covenant-keepers, this is the doctrine of *definitive sanctification*. Covenant-keepers are told to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). This is the doctrine of *progressive sanctification*. The Sermon on the Mount is a guide to working out this salvation.

Saving *faith* in Christ is faith in the saving *works* of Christ. This is why theological liberalism cannot save. The liberal asserts his faith in Jesus, called the Christ, but this Christ is said to be an imperfect man who did not serve as man's judicial representative before God. He was a great moral teacher, we are told, but He was not fundamentally different from what we are. He was not perfect, just as we are not perfect. He was evolving, just as we are. Liberal faith is judicial nonsense. Faith in a Christ who was not a perfect sacrifice on God's altar does not save man from God's eternal wrath. Faith in a blemished sacrifice does not save anyone. It is faith without works—Christ's perfect works. Christ is the vine; His people are the branches (John 15). The perfection of the vine is the source of the branches' fruit. There is consistency between vine and fruit. The goodness of the fruit testifies publicly to the perfection of the vine. *Bad fruit testifies to an imperfect*

9. John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1959] 1992).

10. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 124–25.

vine, which is false testimony. This is why God the Father brings negative sanctions in history and eternity against those who testify falsely about the moral character of His Son.

D. Good Words, Good Works

"Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6). The imagery of salt as something positive is retained in this passage. *There must be consistency between word and deed*. Good words must not be refuted by bad works. The issue of consistency is basic to the Sermon on the Mount. This is not logical consistency; it is *ethical* consistency. Verbal testimony is confirmed by visible testimony. This is why salt must not lose its savor, and candles must not be hidden under baskets.

The works of Jesus confirmed His words. Consider the miracles of feeding and healing. He brought positive sanctions into the lives of those who could not buy them. Some of these sanctions were not available at any price. *The magnitude of His words were confirmed by the magnitude of His works*.

> And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men (Matt. 9:2–8).

Covenant-keepers are to imitate Christ. While only rarely can they perform miracles of healing, they can offer acts of healing at no price to the recipients. Like Jesus, they can bring healing to those who cannot afford to pay. Again, Matthew 25 is the model:

> And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an

> hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:33–40).

Jesus' works confirmed His words. His words alone could have condemned all mankind, but He offered *saving words*, and these required *saving works*. The covenant has sanctions. These sanctions are historical. Jesus brought positive sanctions and occasional negative sanctions to confirm His words. The negative sanction against the fig tree was representative of what would come upon Israel in a generation.

> And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there. Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matt. 21:17–22).

There is a tendency among Protestants to separate good works from good words. This is partially the result of a deep and abiding antinomianism: Christianity as a covenant with neither law nor sanctions. It is partially the result of a doctrine of Christ's salvation that ignores the imputation of His perfect works to covenant-keepers. The result of such a truncated doctrine of the covenant is salt without savor, i.e., positive confession without positive sanctions. God brings comprehensive negative sanctions against hypocritical faith. "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20). Dead faith is publicly buried by a living God.

E. Good Works in Charity and Business

Charity is a good work. When men give away their time or wealth in the name of Christ, they testify to their faith in God. They proclaim their confidence that "there's more where that came from." As covenant-keepers, they affirm the cause-and-effect nature of wealth in

history: wealth as a public affirmation of the covenant. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).[11] He testifies to his faith in the linearity of growth: wealth, obedience, greater wealth, greater obedience.

Charitable giving lowers men's resistance to the gospel. It opens doors. Men begin to ask themselves why the person is showing such charity. His acts of charity impress them. They know that selfless giving is a good thing. They want to know why the individual is confident that his giving will not reduce him to poverty.

There is another factor: imitation. Men may begin to imitate the giver. They perceive that the world is better off because of charity. They may test the proposition with respect to their own lives. This is positive for them and for society.

In business, charitable dealing is also beneficial. There is a phrase known to those who do repeat business: "Leave something on the table for the other guy." Business success is usually dependent on repeat business. The cost of generating a new customer is high. The cost of generating a repeat sale is much lower, but only if the buyer is happy with the first exchange. So, the wise businessman is careful to deliver more than he agreed to in the original contract. He adds an extra benefit. This impresses the buyer, who gets more than he paid for. He can afford to do business with this seller. His risks are reduced, meaning that his costs is reduced. When a seller decreases the buyer's price of doing business, he gains more business.

Jesus spoke of going the extra mile with the tyrant. The same principle applies to business. The buyer perceives that he can trust the seller. He is willing to send more business his way. In business, there is a procedure for reducing risk called tit for tat: repayment in kind. If a seller drives a hard bargain this time, the buyer will drive a hard bargain next time. The best way for both parties to secure a stream of benefits from each other is to give more in exchange.

Conclusion

The top priority here is to become flavorful salt. This requires extra effort on the part of covenant-keepers. Later in this sermon, we read: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust

11. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.

doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19–21).[12] Jesus laid the groundwork for this conclusion in the earlier passages. This is one of those passages.

The issue here is salt as a positive or negative sanction in history. Salt can supply flavor or it can destroy growth. God wants it to supply flavor. His people are to allocate their assets of money and time to those kingdom-building works that have personal consequences in eternity because such works have social consequences in history. The salt of the earth must not become salt in the earth. God's people are to make the world a better place than it was before they arrived on the scene. This mandates progress in history.

God's covenant is a covenant of salt. Salt flavors and it also destroys its enemies. It brings both positive and negative sanctions. As it extends through society, it satisfies the good and destroys the evil. God uses savorless salt to cut off rival kingdoms, but this is no comfort to the savorless salt.

12. Chapter 13.

6

THE CITY ON A HILL

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

MATTHEW 5:14–16

The theocentric focus of this passage is an aspect of God: light. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:5–7). Men are to represent God: point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. The Imagery of Light

The first image is that of a world-illuminating light. The second is a city on a hill. The third is a candle in the darkness. The entire passage clearly rests on the imagery of light, including the image of the city. The imagery of the city implies a city at night, a place surrounded by darkness. Men light candles for their homes, and these lights testify at a distance to the existence of a city. At night, men cannot see the buildings of the hilltop city, but they see its lights. A candle is singular and testifies only to its owner. A city full of shining candles

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

testifies to the existence of the city. Similarly, an individual does good works, testifying to his own righteousness, but taken together, those who do good works jointly testify to something larger than any one individual: the city of God.

Jesus called each of His listeners to a life of good works.[2] He reminded each of them regarding the power of a candle in a dark house. It gives light to everyone in the house. That is, one person's good works improve life for those around him. The righteous individual positively affects others. But in calling many men to good works, Jesus reminded them of the corporate effect of their good works: to illuminate the city on a hill. Those who do good are not alone. They are part of a larger entity. Good works are cumulative and reinforcing.

A candle's light is a positive thing in a dark place. In the brightness of the day, men do not light candles. Flames on candles can barely be seen in the daylight. But at night, one candle can keep many people from stumbling. The darker the surroundings, the greater the positive sanction of light. To a community in great darkness, a candle makes life easier. Men will be less likely to stumble, to grope slowly in confusion, and to be rendered nearly powerless. The positive sanction of one candle becomes a benefit to many. This is what Christ's analogy of the single candle was intended to convey.

There is a famous saying: "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." But for some, darkness is a blessing. It hides their evil deeds. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:17–21). For evil-doers, light is a negative sanction. This is another good reason to light a candle.

The candle imagery emphasizes the benefits to many from the righteousness of one. But there is more to the corporate aspect of the sanction of light than what is provided by the solitary candle. In

2. Good works are predestinated by God: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

a city, many people light candles. The light of one candle has positive effects beyond the room of the house. Windows allow a light to shine outside the house. The distant traveller can see many household lights on the hill. He knows the location of his destination. He is not yet at the gates of the city, but he can see it.

One candle benefits many in the house. Many candles in the same city benefit those at a distance, if that city is on a hill. Jesus was conveying to His listeners the idea that they would not be alone in their righteousness. The good deeds of one person would have a greater effect because of the good deeds of another. How much light is sufficient to be seen at a distance? Not much. Consider military strategy. It was the policy of the Germans and the Allies in World War II to bomb cities from the air, despite the presence of civilians. Saturation bombing was a standard tactic of both sides in Europe. Bombers that flew at night were harder to shoot down than those that flew by day, but their bombing was less accurate. It was difficult for them to identify their targets. A light in a window identified a potential urban target. A cluster of lights made the area a target. This is why European cities had blackouts. No one was allowed to light a light in his home unless the home's windows were sealed by black curtains or black paper. If a light could be seen from the street, it was illegal, for it could be seen from the sky.

B. The Free Rider Problem

The person who lights a candle benefits himself. He makes his own way clearer. But there are "free riders" in his house: beneficiaries who do not pay. They, too, are able to see more clearly. Because of their status as family members or guests, the man with the burning candle is content to let them enjoy the light as a gift. But there may also be beneficiaries outside his house. Those on the street outside have a little more light because it shines through his window. Also, while one candle may not be seen at a great distance, many candles can be seen. Men in a city on a hill who light their individual candles thereby produce an unintended consequence: those travelling to their city can locate it. This is a free benefit to the travellers and to those who rent out lodging in the city.

1. The Free Rider

The free market economist struggles with the theoretical problem of the free rider. He believes with all his heart, mind, and soul that

there is no such thing as a free lunch or a free light. Someone must pay. If some people benefit from another person's expenditure without paying for it, they will tend not to provide that service for themselves. Thus, less of it will be produced than people are willing and able to buy. The economist sees this free service as an inefficient solution to society's problem of allocating scarce resources.

His conclusion is theoretically unjustified because he cannot measure interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. No such collective scale exists. No unit of measurement exists even for the individual. An individual is unable to measure exactly how much more he values A over B. Therefore, the economist has no way to speak scientifically of a society's benefits or losses. He has no way to measure aggregates of subjective utilities.[3] Yet, with few exceptions, economists offer politicians suggestions for economic policy whenever asked, and even when they are not asked. To put it bluntly, the economist is faking it, but he gets away with this deception because all of his peers are faking it, too. They pretend that their individualistic epistemology can lead to state-imposed solutions for collective problems.[4] This is not to say that the real-world problem of the free rider does not exist. It does exist, but humanistic economic science is unable to solve it and also remain consistent with its presuppositions.

If someone can benefit from another person's actions, should he be compelled by the state to compensate the other person? In most cases, says the free market economist, the answer is no. But, he asks, what about those cases where the capital owner will not perform the service unless he is paid? If all of the beneficiaries of his action are not compelled to pay, why should any of them pay? But if none of them pays, the service will not be provided. Society—a conceptual aggregate—obtains less of the service than its members would be willing to pay for if all of them were compelled to pay. The classic example is national defense. If money spent by citizens A through M to defend their city also protects citizens N through Z, why shouldn't citizens N through Z be compelled to repay citizens A through M for N through Z's share of the costs of the defense project? If they refuse to pay, citizens A through M may not pay. The city will then be defended less effectively.

3. Murray N. Rothbard, "Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics" (1956), in Rothbard, *Economic Controversies* (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 2011), ch. 17.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 5.

The economic problem here is the identification of ownership. Citizens A through M do not own all of the property that the enemy's bombers may target. If citizens A through M cannot protect their portion of the city from bombing without also protecting the lives and property citizens N through Z, shouldn't the latter be asked to pay their share of the anti-aircraft equipment and operations? Citizens A through M cannot establish ownership of the territory owned by citizens N through Z. They also cannot effectively protect just one part of the city. But without the funding by citizens N through Z, the anti-aircraft system is too expensive for citizens A through M to build, i.e., they are unwilling to fund it. Everyone is less safe because members of the second group refuse to pay. If anyone in the city can easily escape the economic burden, few people will voluntarily contribute.

2. Negative Civil Sanctions

To solve the dilemma of who should pay under which conditions, we must invoke biblical covenant theology. We begin with this presupposition: *the state does not have the authority to bring positive sanctions*. Its God-given task is to impose negative sanctions on convicted evil-doers. In this light, the invading military force is an evil to be destroyed, i.e., placed under negative sanctions. An anti-aircraft system is a negative sanction against enemy bombers. It is the civil government's function to protect everyone under its jurisdiction from foreign governments that would otherwise impose negative sanctions against the legitimate state and the residents it protects. Defense expenditures buy the implements of negative covenantal sanctions, i.e., the means for the suppression of evil. The expenditure-reducing effects of the free rider must be reduced. The free rider must be compelled to contribute his share of the defense against evil.

This is not an argument against the legitimacy of the free rider in the area of positive sanctions. If I want to paint my home, thereby improving the value of other real estate in my neighborhood, this is not a legitimate reason for me to threaten civil sanctions against those neighbors who do not choose to pay me to paint my home. It is also not a legitimate reason for me to seek government intervention to force every neighbor to improve his home, so that my expenditure will not be wasted. There is no covenantally legitimate reason that would justify the state's coercion in this matter. The free riders should be allowed to enjoy the ride.

When those living in a city on a hill light candles to light their homes, travellers at a distance become free riders. The men who light those candles have no legal claim on the income of those being guided by their lights. Besides, how could any traveller know how much to pay any particular candle owner? The government could collect a "candle tax" at the gates of the city, distributing a prorated share to all candle lighters. This would create a bureaucratic nightmare, with candle-lighters adding unneeded candles if the subsidy is made on the basis of candles actually lit. Also, there would have to be a candle police unit to search the town for cheaters who collected the light-a-candle subsidy without actually lighting all of their candles.

Because of the private property system, a free rider lawfully enjoys access to a positive sanction paid for by someone else. As long as this sanction is positive and no fraud or violence is being imposed by the beneficiaries on the provider of the benefit, the civil government has no legitimate role in allocating access to or payment for the benefit. But when the sanction is negative against outsiders, such as invaders, the state sometimes has a legitimate role in imposing defense costs on free riders.

3. The Positive Sanction of Grace

This text imposes an obligation on the recipients of God's grace. They must light candles. They light them for themselves, but they must rest content that others may freely benefit from the light. In this way, the city on a hill will remain a beacon to the lost.

The entire world is a free rider on God's grace.[5] The fact that God did not immediately kill Adam and Eve testifies to their status as free riders in history. *Common grace is the doctrinal basis of free rider economics*. God grants life, power, knowledge, and time to covenantbreakers and covenant-keepers alike. He then calls on His people to do the same. *Good works to others are visible signs that God's people acknowledge their status as free riders*. "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8).[6]

C. Cumulative Good Works

The more candles burning, the less the darkness. Each person's individual candle removes some darkness. The farther away from the

5. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

6. Chapter 22.

source of light, the dimmer the surroundings. For someone to get through the town without stumbling, every household must light a candle close to a window. The more burning candles, the safer the wanderer. There will be fewer lost people and fewer crimes committed by the haters of light.[7]

The spread of the gospel is to be accompanied by the spread of good works. These good works add up. They make life in the community of saints more pleasant. Even those who do not share the confession of faith are benefitted. They see the good works of the faithful, and they glorify God (v. 16). This is what God wants.

Darkness is driven out by light. Darkness is not the equal of light. It cannot withstand light. The power of light is positive; darkness is a negative factor. Darkness exists only where there is no light. God dispelled darkness on the first day of creation (Gen. 1:3). It took a positive act to accomplish this, but this positive act was triumphant.

There is a problem with light, however. As more candles are lit, each one provides a reduced percentage of the total light. The law of diminishing returns sets in. In the initial phase of the candle-lighting process, each candle reinforced the growth of light, driving away shadows that the first candles produced. But as more and more are lit, they may even bother the guest. All he can see is a sea of candles. There comes a point when it does not pay to light another candle, other things being equal. But, down the road, things are still dark. There, the brightness has not penetrated. Men are to take their candles to dark areas where there is no light. The extent of the darkness is so great that any extra candles always have a role to play, though not in the local area. We are to export light by exporting our candles.

Jesus was calling for world evangelism. It was not merely that His listeners were to light their candles. They could carry their candles, nicely lit, to help others light their candles. Like a torch used to light other torches, so is the gospel. The light of candles can also light a candle-producing factory throughout the night. Two or three shifts of candle-makers can be employed in winter months, when the nights are long.

The law of diminishing returns is even a factor in the production of righteousness. It leads to a kind of apathy about doing more good works. As the environment in which we live gets less threatening, we become complacent. But there is so much darkness in this world, so much work to be done, that there is always a place for another candle. It just may not be in the house or city where candles are common.

7. There may be more fires.

As good works multiply, society is transformed. Just as candles placed in the windows of every home will throw light onto the streets, thereby reducing crime, so are good works. They have a spillover effect. As each person follows God's lead, those around him are benefitted. There is no way that Christianity can transform souls only. Souls-only evangelism is an impossibility. The cumulative effect of good works is to reform society.

D. A Model for Other Cities

A well-lit city on a hill will attract visitors. This will decrease income for residents of dark cities in the valleys. Those who see the benefits of living in a city on a hill will move to one. Others will try to imitate it. The competition for righteousness grows because of the positive effects of righteousness. Good works have good consequences.

Actions that produce positive sanctions are worth imitating. This is why light is superior to darkness. The forces of darkness have an advantage only because men are born sinners. But this advantage is offset by the negative effects of sin. The consequences of sin are such that people seek to avoid them. More and more, they seek the fruits of righteousness without the ethical roots. Bank robbers like to drive on safe streets, even if they drive too fast immediately after their bank robberies. Criminals want access to physicians whenever they get sick or are shot. No one wants to live in darkness all of the time.

The city on a hill stands out. It becomes a working model for other cities. So does righteousness. That was Jesus' point. It was not that righteousness brings persecution every time. On the contrary, those who persecute the righteous will eventually fail. In a world of liars, truth-tellers have an advantage. In a world of slothful people, industrious people have an advantage. In a world of sloppy work, the careful producer has an advantage. That anyone should put a candle under a basket is foolish: the only way that any light will be generated is if the basket catches on fire. What good is a candle under a basket? Similarly, what good is salvation without good works? Salvation without good works is as foolish as a burning candle under a basket. It takes an act of stupidity to place a burning candle under a basket. It defeats the purpose of lighting the candle, and it also threatens the basket. Similarly, it takes an act of stupidity to hide one's salvation by refusing to do good works. It is not merely that personal salvation will always produce good works, i.e., positive sanctions; it is that it takes a self-conscious act of stupidity to restrict salvation-generated

good works. Such an act is contrary to the essence of salvation. Jesus told His opponents: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:11–13).[8] The city on a hill is supposed to reveal God's grace in action. Good works are attractive to fallen men. Good works are a form of evangelism, just as God's law is (Deut. 4:4–8).[9] Rare is the man so judicially blind that he does not appreciate good deeds—if not shown to him, then at least to his children. Members of other nations, other religions, and other ways of life are to see the good works of Christians, and say: "This is a better way." Light is better than darkness.

Conclusion

The imagery of light applies to the city as well as the candle. It is corporate as well as individual. Individual salvation is supposed to produce social salvation (healing). The difference between Christianity and its rivals should be as clear as the difference between light and darkness. The city on a hill is worth imitating. The burning candle is worth removing from under the basket. Christians are supposed to let their lights shine, despite the free rider problem. Those around Christians are supposed to be the recipients of common grace: the crumbs that fall from the tables owned by Christians. If others are blessed because of the righteousness of covenant-keepers, God is pleased. What the economists call *externalities*—unowned overflow—should increase in the presence of covenant-keepers. These should be positive externalities. Negative externalities we call pollution. The civil government should act to reduce negative physical externalities—at some price.[10]

This passage's top priority for Christians is to produce light, not to get others to pay for it. This light is both spiritual and visible. "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brin-

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press,[2000] 2012), ch. 22.

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

10. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Appendix H.

geth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:17).[11] The goal is an increase in the production of good fruit. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2). Put another way, the goal of the passage is the increase of positive externalities. In a godly city, these become cumulative. The wealth of all is increased by the willingness of covenant-keepers to allow free riders to share the blessings of righteousness. The darkness surrounding covenant-breakers is reduced at no extra charge. It is more important for the covenant-keeper to increase light than to collect a fee from all who benefit.

11. Chapter 18.

7

RECONCILIATION BEFORE FORMAL SACRIFICE

> *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*
>
> MATTHEW 5:22–24

The theocentric basis of this law is peace with God. This is an aspect of the peace treaty: God's covenant. The doctrine of the covenant is point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Brotherly Peace

If a man's brother is not at peace with him, then he cannot be at peace with God. His brother has a complaint against him—a cause. This has disrupted the bond between them. It has therefore disrupted the bond between the man offering the gift and God. In this sense, his brother represents God to him. If he cannot get things settled with his brother, he cannot please God with the gift. The gift is in this sense profane: a violation of a sacred boundary. The sacred boundary is the altar: the place of God's unique judicial presence. Judicial peace should prevail in this holy place. But there is no judicial peace

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

between the covenant-keeper and his brother. The gift is therefore unholy. It is in this sense unclean. To offer it on the altar is to profane the altar. It must be left in front of the altar, but not burned or otherwise used by the priest or ecclesiastical representative.

This gift is in addition to the tithe. It is something special, comparable to one of the first three Mosaic offerings (Lev. 3).[2] The tithe is owed to God by all covenant-keepers. It is not given to win favor with God. It is given because it belongs to God by way of the local church.[3]

The text says to leave the gift before the altar. That is, the person is not to bring the gift, remember the brother's cause, and then decide not to offer it. He is to leave the gift before the altar, i.e., leave it behind. He is then to get matters straightened out with the brother. Then he is to return to offer the gift. The gift is no longer in his possession once he brings it to the altar. It is held by the ecclesiastical leader in charge of the altar. This gives an economic incentive to the man to get the matter settled. Until he does, he is neither to offer his gift nor take it back. It is doing him no good, either as a capital asset or as a gift to God.

It is not the responsibility of the priestly representative of God to enquire regarding the spiritual life of every covenant-keeper who comes to make an offering. The priest is not expected to know the details of every gift-offerer's life. Those making gifts are presumed innocent. But if the priest knows of a unsettled dispute between the gift-offerer and his brother, he is not to accept the gift. He is to encourage the giver to get the matter settled. But he is also to remind him to leave the gift with the church, as he had originally intended to do.

God is not in need of our gifts. This means that the ecclesiastical representative must discipline himself to do without profane gifts. He must not act as though he is dependent on profane gifts, for that would testify to the church's dependence on men rather than God. The more he is in need of the gift, the greater is his incentive to intervene to help settle the dispute. This means that the church is the institution with the greatest economic incentive to restore peace among its members and their relatives or fellow believers.

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2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 1–3.

3. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

The gift-giver cannot lawfully reclaim his gift. The priest wants the gift. God will be pleased with the gift if it is not profane. The giver is now trapped. He must settle the matter with his brother. The question is: How?

B. Who Is at Fault?

The dispute is a matter of law, once the gift is brought into God's presence. The dispute must be settled lawfully. The gift-giver knows there is a dispute. Can he get it settled? Must he capitulate to the brother, just because the brother has something against him? No. But they can bring it before the church courts if they can't settle it.

The brother may be wrong. He may be at fault himself. The gift-giver is not presumed guilty by God. He is merely considered to be out of fellowship with his brother and therefore not fit to offer the gift.

The settling of disputes is a judicial matter, but it need not be settled by a court. It may have to be, however. The matter must be laid to rest if the gift is to be acceptable.

If a church court announces the terms of the settlement, and the gift-giver conforms, he is now free to offer the gift. If his brother still resents him, the gift is nevertheless valid. Some men cannot be reconciled to their brothers. They will not forgive. The gift-giver is not to be made a permanent victim, unable to offer his gift, just because his brother is stubborn. The church is not to be penalized because of an unforgiving brother. The court's declaration heals the matter judicially. This is sufficient to transform the status of the gift from profane to acceptable.

Conclusion

The top priority of this law is reconciliation of brothers. The healing of disputes within the community of the faithful is sufficiently important that the church may not knowingly accept a gift from a participant in such a dispute. Peace is more important to God than gifts. It should be more important to the church, too.

8

EARLY CONFESSION

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

MATTHEW 5:25–26

The theocentric principle of this law is the authority of God to bring eternal punishment against His enemies: sanctions. This is point four of the biblical covenant.[1] God is the adversary who brings a covenant lawsuit in history against those who have broken His covenant. Covenant-breakers are warned to settle with God before the day of judgment, when they will be delivered over to the judge, sentenced, and cast into prison. In prison, a man cannot earn enough to buy his freedom.

Though it is not clear from this passage, prison here is analogous to hell. Jesus' parable of the unjust steward makes this clear: "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:34–35).

The presumption of this passage is that the listener is guilty. His adversary is God. Man does not come before God in a guiltless legal condition. Jesus warned every guilty man against refusing to make restitution to this innocent victim before the case comes before the judge.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. Discount for Early Confession

In the Mosaic law, there was a lower penalty for admitting guilt before the trial. The thief had been accused by the victim, but he had avoided a trial because he had sworn falsely to his neighbor that he was innocent. "Then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good" (Ex. 22:11).[2] The thief was required to repay whatever he had stolen, plus 20%. "Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering" (Lev. 6:4–5).[3]

The presumption here is that the thief had already sworn falsely. His adversary comes to him and demands payment. Does he have new evidence? Can he now prove that the thief had in fact stolen his goods? If so, the thief faces a greater penalty if convicted: double restitution (Ex. 22:4),[4] plus a trespass offering—a slain ram (Lev. 6:6)—to the church in payment for the false oath.

The Mosaic law offered a discount for timely confession: before the false oath, no trespass offering was required, though restitution was. After the false oath to the neighbor, a 20% penalty was required and a trespass offering. After the trial, double restitution and a trespass offering were required. This system reduced the expense to the victim or the civil court for gaining a conviction. It lowered the price of civil justice.

B. New Evidence

The guilty man in this case thinks that he can avoid making restitution to his victim. His adversary confronts him, but still he persists in his deception. His adversary suspects that he has committed the crime. Nevertheless, the guilty party refuses to admit this and pay the victim.

The key question for the guilty party is this: Can the victim prove his case in a court? Has he additional evidence that will lead to his

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press,, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 46.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

4. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 43.

conviction? The assumption of Jesus' warning here is that the victim possesses additional evidence. Perhaps he has witnesses. Whatever he has, the victim is offering the criminal one more opportunity to "come clean." He is being given another opportunity to confess his guilt and escape from the court by means of a reduced payment. Jesus warned His listeners: accept the offer. Do not risk suffering a far harsher penalty when the judge hands down his decision.

The guilty party may think to himself, "I have successfully avoided conviction previously. I think I will avoid it this time, too. Yes, there is some risk, but I would rather bear this risk than make a settlement with my victim now." This is unwise, Jesus said. Confess now. Make restitution now.

The assumption of this passage is that the victim has new evidence—compelling evidence—and will gain a conviction. Theologically speaking, the criminal is dealing with an omniscient God who is his judge. In His court, no guilty party will ever escape conviction. The force of the passage comes from the presumption that the adversary possesses evidence that will hold up in court.

C. The Merciful Victim

The biblical principle of justice is victim's rights.[5] The victim has approached the guilty party and has graciously offered him one more opportunity to clear up the matter. He is under no obligation to do this. He has already confronted the criminal, and he has sworn that he was innocent. This oath may have been taken in private, or it may have been taken in public. God heard it.

The victim understands this law court. It will impose the penalty of prison. In this court, the risk is permanent incarceration. Such a penalty offers no hope for the convict, other than restitution made on his behalf by a free man. This was not a Mosaic penalty. The Mosaic penalties were flogging, restitution, and execution.[6] Jesus was speak-

5. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

6. There was a unique penalty imposed on a wife who grabbed the genitals of her husband's opponent when he and her husband were fighting (Deut. 25:11–12). The King James translators translated the penalty as cutting off her hand. James Jordan says it meant deeply cutting her hand through the palm. The word in Deuteronomy 25:12 is *kaph* or *kaf*, which Strong's Concordance defines as "the hollow hand or palm (so of the paw of an animal, of the sole, and even of the bowl of a dish or sling, the handle of a bolt, the leaves of a palm-tree); fig. power:-branch, + foot, hand ([-ful], -dle, [-led]), hollow, middle, palm, paw, power, sole, spoon." To cut a palm is different from cutting off a hand.

ing to an audience in the Roman Empire. Rome used prisons as the means of punishment. The Mosaic law aimed at restoration through restitution to the victim. Execution was the means of delivering a convicted man into God's court. There was no prison system, precisely because prison is God's monopoly. *Hell is God's prison*. Everyone sentenced to this prison receives an eternal life sentence. There is no way to buy your way out. There is no mercy shown.

This is why the victim in this passage is merciful. He has the evidence that will convict the man. Nevertheless, he approaches him one more time to persuade him to admit his guilt and pay what he owes. If the case comes to trial, the guilty party will have no hope. The language Jesus invoked here is a sentence without mercy: payment to the last farthing—to the last penny, in other words.

What kind of person, knowing his guilt, would reject the offer? Only someone who assumes that the victim does not have the evidence. In other words, he underestimates his victim. He trusts in his own cleverness in covering up the crime. He also underestimates the severity of the court. After all, he has previously escaped a permanent penalty. Why not again?

Ultimately, Jesus was calling men to recognize Him as the victim who has the evidence necessary to convict them. The heavenly judge will recognize the legitimacy of this evidence and will convict. The criminal will surely suffer the penalty. What He was saying was that every man is guilty before God. But there is a way of escape. The guilty person can declare his guilt to the victim and make restitution to him privately. The dispute will not go to court. The case can be settled in advance of a trial.

Payment in advance assumes that the criminal is economically capable of making restitution. If he isn't, then he needs to find someone who will pay the victim on his behalf, while the opportunity for making a substitute payment is still available. After the court declares his guilt, this opportunity will be lost. The man will be cast into prison and forced to pay. But in prison, he cannot gain access to the money necessary to make this restitution payment. Hence, his punishment will be permanent. He will never get out. The language of the passage implies life imprisonment. The theology of the passage implies eternal life imprisonment. It implies that God is content with extracting payment through by tormenting rebels forever.

Conclusion

One goal of biblical law is the early confession of guilt. A reduced penalty payment is offered to those who admit their guilt before the trial begins. Jesus warned His listeners that they should settle with their adversary early. This presumed that they were guilty.

The top priority here is gaining the admission of guilt prior to trial. The cost of obtaining justice is less when guilty men admit their guilt early. This is a benefit for the victims of crime. It is a benefit for society, which gains justice at a lower cost. He who is guilty is required by God to admit this fact early. The system of eternal judgment rests on the validity of this principle.

9

BRIBING TYRANTS

> *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*
>
> MATTHEW 5:38–42

The theocentric issue here is the judgment of God on a rebellious nation: sanctions. This is point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. The Purpose of Tyrants

God brings tyrants to power in order to use them as rods of iron in history. Tyranny, especially through invasion and defeat, is God's response to injustice in a covenanted nation. Isaiah warned:

> Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless! And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory? Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

> indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets (Isa. 10:1–6).

These laws require the covenant-keeper to subordinate himself meekly to covenant-breakers. The proper response to injustice, Jesus said here, is acceptance. The victim of injustice must not only accept it, he must open himself for greater injustice. He must bear the cost of injustice and then offer an additional payment. He must submit to tyranny.

Tyranny must be seen in its covenantal and historical context. Jesus was speaking to a captive people. Jews in the northern kingdom had been carried away into Assyria. Jews in the southern kingdom had been carried into Babylon. Those few who returned under Medo-Persia lived under foreign rule. Their heirs lived under the heirs of the Macedonian Empire, which fell to Rome. Israel had been under foreign rule for over six centuries. They had known nothing but captivity and foreign domination. They had learned to live under foreign law as a captive nation.

B. An Open Conspiracy[2]

Jesus did not call His listeners to revolt. He called them to obedience. He did not teach revolution through power. He taught revolution through moral example. His concern was the kingdom of God. In its historical manifestation, this kingdom is one of justice and righteousness. The program to defeat tyranny is a return to personal justice and righteousness. The answer to bad civil laws begins with good personal rules. This is not the final answer, however. It is only the first step.

Tyranny is systematic. It is part of a corporate system. It becomes a way of life. Corruption spreads. This corruption eventually undermines it. What will replace it? A new tyranny? If men die in revolutionary violence or conspiracy, only to lay the foundation for a new tyranny, where is the gain? What the French Revolution launched and the Communist revolutions completed was a social experiment: violence for the sake of cleansing, and power for the sake of power.

Violence breeds violence. Conspiracy breeds more conspiracy. The kingdom of God is to be proclaimed openly. "Jesus answered him, I

2. The phrase is from H. G. Wells, *The Open Conspiracy: Blue Prints for a World Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928).

spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20). He spoke in parables, but He spoke openly. He did not create a secret society that was bound by a self-maledictory blood oath. He created a church that was bound by a self-maledictory public sign: baptism.

The church is an open conspiracy. Members conspire: breathe together. They do so openly. Preaching is public. The sacraments are taken in public. Only when tyrannies place negative sanctions against these otherwise public activities are Christians called by God to go into the shadows.

What is visible is righteousness. What is visible are good works. This theme appears throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus called on His listeners to go the extra mile. Why? Because doing so would buy peace. Peace makes it easier for the open conspiracy to enlist new adherents. Paul wrote: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:1–4).[3]

C. Turning the Cheek

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (vv. 38–39). This seems to be a rejection of the *lex talionis:* eye for eye (Ex. 21:24;[4] Lev. 24:20;[5] Deut. 19:21[6]). Eye for eye means that the punishment should fit the crime. This principle of justice undergirds civil sanctions in the Mosaic Covenant. Was Jesus rejecting the Mosaic Covenant? Hardly: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 2.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 37.

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 23.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia; Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17–19). Then why did He preface his command to turn the other cheek with "ye have heard it said"? This phrase usually appears as His preface to a rejection of a traditional Jewish law which was not supported by the Mosaic law.

The context was civil power. A person who would strike one of Jesus' listeners was a man in authority or who had the support of the civil authority. There was nothing the victim could do to repay, eye for eye, without resorting to private justice. But God had placed His covenant people under foreign rule for many centuries. This subordination was no temporary affliction. It was a way of life. Their fathers had sinned against God's law for so long that He never again allowed Israel to run its own political affairs.

Jesus warned "that ye resist not evil." Yet we read elsewhere: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). The devil is the very incarnation of evil. Why, then, did Jesus say to resist not evil? Because evil in this context was *the evil of tyranny*. It was God's judgment on His people that they had been forced to live under a series of legal systems not based on biblical law. Such a civil condition is a mark of God's negative sanctions against a nation. Jesus told them to put up with tyranny for the time being. He told them to go the extra mile.

D. Something Extra

"And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also" (v. 40). The context is civil authority. The man was not a common thief. He had the force of law behind him. He had proven this. He had won the case. He had won the coat. What was the proper response. Offer him more.

Why? Because a free man can usually earn another cloak. A man in prison cannot. If the victorious plaintiff decided to sue again, the victim would probably lose. The strategy here is to give the litigious man something extra. Let him sue somebody else. The man may enjoy going to court. For most people, going to court is a traumatic, expensive experience. When you have lost to a man who is allied with the authorities, it is wise to stay out of court. The strategy here is to

buy him off, the same way Jacob bought off Esau when he sought to return to Canaan through Esau's land: give him gifts he did not deserve (Gen. 32).[7]

"And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain" (v. 41). The same principle applies in this example. The victim is operating under compulsion. He is not a free man. Go the extra mile. Heap eternal coals of fire on his head (Rom. 12:20). This is a generally safe tactic to use against the enemy. But it has short-run costs. You pay extra now to avoid trouble in the future. You reduce future costs by incurring present costs.

"Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (v. 42). Here is another example of giving something extra. Normally, this verse would lead to bankruptcy. If a person who has capital gives away money to everyone who would like to borrow, he will soon have no capital. The offer of free money will be accepted by most people. Why would Jesus recommend stripping His people of their capital? Is this a permanent requirement?

This requirement must be seen within the context of tyranny. A man with political connections comes to a successful victim and asks for a loan. In all likelihood, he does not intend to repay it. He understands how the legal system works. It is on his side. This loan will be difficult to collect. The man with capital is to assess the power of the would-be borrower. Is this man in a position to create problems? Can he use his authority illegitimately? If so, avoid trouble: give him what he wants.

E. Implicit Bribes

When a person gives something extra to a poor person, the gift is not a bribe. It is a gift. It is an extension of mercy. But when a person gives a gift to someone with power over him, we generally call the gift a bribe.

What is the Bible's view of bribery? That depends on whether you are a victim of tyranny or a ruler. The mark of an unrighteous ruler is his acceptance of bribes. "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the

7. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 26.

righteous" (Deut. 16:18–19).[8] But for the righteous man trapped in a corrupt legal system, offering a bribe is one way to gain justice. "A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth" (Prov. 17:8). "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (Prov. 18:16). "A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath" (Prov. 21:14).[9]

This passage provides guidance for righteous people who are trapped in a corrupt legal order. Instead of fighting back, Jesus said, make peace. Instead of seeking vengeance, seek peace. When you are confronted with a man who has the power to take what he wants from you, offer it in advance. Honor this power by offering something extra: more than he deserves. This is the way to peace. It appears to be a costly way to peace, but in fact it is the less expensive way. It requires an extra payment in the present, but it lowers the cost of righteous living over the long run. To gain peace is a way to gain time. Time is what righteous men need to begin to construct an alternative to tyranny. It gives them time to learn the ways of righteousness and productivity. This is especially true when tyranny is increasing in both evil and power.

F. Accelerating Evil

Economics tells us that we discount the future. This discount is the origin of interest.[10] The investor must be given a promise of more goods in exchange for the use of his present goods. Why did Jesus tell men to hand over present goods to evil-doers with power? Because evil in this context was getting worse. The evil-doer will demand more in the future—lots more. He will demand so much more that it is wiser to gain his cooperation now. This is what happened in A.D. 66–70. The Jewish Zealots became more tyrannical. Rome reciprocated, and then some. Old Covenant Israel was coming to an end in Jesus' day. Jesus was warning His listeners not to participate in revolutionary movements against the oppressors. Better to cooperate now and avoid destruction later.

Christians went through a year of persecution under Nero in A.D. 64. The horrifying stories of this persecution have come down to us

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 40.

9. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), pp. 837–48.

10. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 19.

for almost two millennia. Christians were singled out as judicially separate from the Jews, who were under special legal protection. But this legal separation by persecution was the church's deliverance. In A.D. 66, Israel revolted against Rome. The church, no longer seen by Rome as being part of Israel or Judaism, escaped destruction.[11] Now the prophesied days of vengeance on Israel had arrived.[12]

Submission can be seen as weakness or strength. If the one who submits is seen as cowardly, he invites more persecution. But if his submission is seen as a pattern of behavior based on helping the weak as well as the strong, then submission is seen as a product of a higher ethic, or a higher calling. If the man lends a hand to rich and poor, strong and weak, then he is seen as not being servile but superior. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most comprehensive statement of *non-servile subordination*. Submission to authority is not a mark of cowardice if it is part of a program of personal ethical transformation based on extending grace—unearned gifts—to all men. This extension of grace is exactly what the Sermon on the Mount teaches.

G. Revolution Through Cooperation

"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee" (Prov. 25:21–22). This program of victory over one's enemies was articulated in the days of Solomon's rule, the period of Israel's greatest power. It is therefore a strategy for all seasons. Jesus merely articulated a variant of it. Paul placed it within the context of civil government:

> Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (Rom. 12:19–13:2).

The individual is not to seek personal vengeance against his enemy. Surely, he is not to seek vengeance against a civil magistrate.

11. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996). pp. 48–51.

12. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

Yet the context of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was a nation under foreign domination. Israel was a nation in bondage. This was why the Jews' response to His message was ludicrous: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" (John 8:31–33). Later, the chief priests (Sadducees) were more honest: "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:13–15).

Then how can the man in bondage, or a nation in bondage, gain freedom? By faithfully obeying God's laws. By building up the habits of obedience to God and His revealed word. There is an old political slogan: "You can't beat something with nothing." What works best as a program of national liberation is a program of liberation from sin. Again, consider the context of Jesus' words to His followers: "They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:33–34). To escape from bondage, He said, avoid sin. There can be no escape from bondage without an escape from sin. *Sin is the ultimate form of bondage in history. But God's judgment against sin in eternity is the ultimate form of bondage*. There is no escape from hell and the lake of fire.

Jesus' program of systematic cooperation is a program of heaping coals of fire on tyrannical heads. Yet it is also a program of evangelism. Men who repay evil with good do catch the attention of many people, including tyrants. There is something special about such a response to evil. Men ask: "Why?"

Good undermines evil. Evil is not self-sustaining. It is parasitical. It undermines productivity. This produces weakness. Tyranny does not persist indefinitely. It recedes in the face of goodness, or it collapses in a display of weakness. The collapse of the Soviet Union, 1989–1991, is the most remarkable collapse of tyranny in the history

of empires. It collapsed without a fight. It was a nearly bloodless abdication of what had been unprecedented power.

Conclusion

The top priority of this passage is outward subordination to tyrannical authority. It is not anti-revolutionary as such; it is anti-vengeance. It is a revolutionary strategy designed to replace tyranny with liberty, which rests on God's Bible-revealed law. The revolutionary aspects of this program are moral. The passage must be seen in the context of Israel's political subordination to Rome. It must also be seen in the context of God's program of grace. His people are to extend grace to others, just as God extended grace to them. Their outward subordination to authority—extending more to tyrants than they deserve—is part of a general program of grace.

This passage is not a guide for the exercise of political power. Civil authority is based upon justice: eye for eye. Victims may extend grace to criminals; the state may not.[13] The passage deals with individuals in political bondage to a state that refuses to extend justice to all. Jesus was here laying down a program of resistance to tyranny, a program based on nonviolent replacement of power. The Sermon on the Mount was a unit. This section deals with powerlessness: a way to gain victory over evil. Heap coals of fire on evil men's heads.

13. Gary North, *Victim's Rights: The Biblical View of Civil Justice* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

10

COMMON GRACE, SPECIAL PEACE

> *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?*
>
> MATTHEW 5:43–47

The theocentric focus of this passage is found in the middle of the passage: "for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (v. 45). God is sovereign: point one of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Non-Discriminatory Blessings

God is sovereign over nature. He sends rain and sunshine in due season on all men, good and bad. He offers all men access to nature's means of production. If God shows mercy to His enemies, then His people should show mercy to their enemies.

What this says is that God does not discriminate. His gifts are widely distributed. Such gifts from God are unearned by the recipients. An unearned gift is called grace in the Bible. God showers and shines His grace on all men. In history, this common grace is to the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

benefit of covenant-breakers. In eternity, it works against them retroactively. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20). "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48).[2]

This passage is important in establishing the truth of the doctrine of common grace.[3] Common grace in history is given freely to all men. For the just, it is a sign of God's favor toward them. For the unjust, it is the means of God's eternal wrath against them. In both cases, the grace is not earned by the recipient.

Grace is a word for salvation. God grants salvation to all men, but especially to the covenant-keeper. "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (I Tim. 4:10).[4] The covenant-keeper is the recipient of special grace and common grace, but the covenant-breaker is the recipient of only common grace.

Does this doctrine imply universal salvation in eternity? No; it implies the opposite: greater wrath for covenant-breakers in eternity. The salvation referred to by Paul in I Timothy 4:10 is God's healing grace in history. It is salvation as *salve*: healing ointment. It allows the just and the unjust to work out their respective eternal conditions. Paul also wrote: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).[5] But as the unjust man works out his salvation in history, he condemns himself eternally. He forgets that God is the source of His life, knowledge, authority, and income. He says in his heart, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17b).[6] This condemns him.

2. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [201] 2012), ch. 6.

5. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

But what about an entire society that says this? Common grace condemns that society. "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 8:19–20).[7] The lure of autonomy from the God of the Bible is great; it leads individuals and societies to destruction.

B. Nature as a Sanctioning Agent

Jesus' announcement meant that the New Covenant has broken with the Mosaic Covenant's system of special favor for Israel. In the Mosaic Covenant, God had promised special blessings for national Israel that included nature itself. Nature in Israel had been unnatural. It had been a means used by God to bring His covenantal sanctions. Nature had been a sanctioning agent.

> If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit (Lev. 26:3–4).[8]

> And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you (Deut. 11:13–17).[9]

> When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance (I Kings 8:35–36).

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7. *Ibid*., ch. 23.
8. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 33.
9. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 28.

> And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word (I Kings 17:1).

Jesus announced the end of nature as a sanctioning agent. No longer would nature serve as a means of God's special cursings and special blessing to covenanted nations. God's special presence inside Israel was about to cease. The temple and the sacrifices had only one generation to go, although Jesus did not announce a specific time limit on the Mosaic sacrifices. God would no longer dwell specially in Old Covenant Israel; nature would no longer be the means of God's corporate sanctions on Israel.

C. Love Your Enemies

The New Covenant reaffirms an Old Covenant requirement: to love our enemies. This love is judicial: showing mercy and justice. God's common grace toward all men is to be revealed by covenant-keepers' general love for all men. God sends sunshine and rain in due season to all men. This is merciful. Covenant-keepers are to pray for all men. God does good to all men through nature. He proposes to do good to all men through His people. In the same way that nature no longer plays favorites in the New Covenant, so covenant-keepers are not to play favorites. They must do good to all men.

This does not mean that covenant-keepers are required to subsidize evil. They are to visit prisoners; they are not to smuggle in tools for their escape. They are to help specific poor people; they are not to give wealth away indiscriminately to every poor man, irrespective of how he became poor. They are not to give alms to drunkards who will use the money to buy more alcohol. They are to give alms to rescue missions that feed and preach to street people who are alcoholics.

The love shown to our enemies is the same kind of love that God shows to us. God provides everyone with sunshine and rain in due season. The enemy here is not a criminal. He is merely an adversary of the individual Christian. He is not a destroyer who uses his skills to prey upon the weak. He is an opponent. God shows mercy in history to His opponents; His people should do the same for their opponents.

When God's people do this, they extend God's common grace. God uses them in a way analogous to how He uses nature: as a means of revealing God's grace in history. By this grace, God brings some to repentance and others to everlasting destruction. Good works heap

coals of fire on some heads and soul-transforming blessings on other heads. We cannot know in advance which effect our love and good works will have. Even if we did know, we should obey God's law anyway. He knows which people will respond to His common grace by repenting and which will worship other gods, including man. Yet He still sends rain and sunshine in due season.

By showing love to all men, covenant-keepers set themselves apart from other men. Their universal love makes them seem different. Lost men ask: "Why?" Peter wrote:

> But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison (I Pet. 3:14–19).

One of the most effective yet little known ministries in the United States is the Kairos prison ministry.[10] Twice a year, a team of Christians goes into a prison, usually a maximum security prison, for a three-day weekend. They bring in food baked by Christians. Forty-two prisoners assemble for the weekend to eat cookies, lasagna, hamburgers, fresh salads, and ice cream—food that is rarely available in prison. The number of cookies consumed in that weekend is staggering: up to 60,000. Cookies are given to the prisoners and the guards. One of the exercises is for prisoners at the end of the second day to take a bag of one dozen cookies to their worst enemy. The prisoners hear very simple applied gospel messages for three days. They are shown love by the outside team. They sing. They pray simple prayers. And by the end of the weekend, as many as half of them make professions of faith. Why does this program work? Because people from the free world with nothing visible to gain treat criminals with friendship. For prisoners, this makes no sense. They keep asking themselves: "Why?" They keep thinking: "What is in it for them? What are they after?" And for a few—sometimes many—the answer dawns: "Because Jesus loves me." These prisoners are brought into God's kingdom.

10. kairosprisonministry.org (accessed January 16, 2021).

Even those who are not brought in speak well of Kairos from then on. Word spreads. Then, when team members come back once a month to visit with the prisoners, word really spreads. For prisoners, Kairos makes no sense. That is its strength.

D. Program for a Captive People

The context of the Sermon on the Mount is important: Roman domination. Covenant-breakers were in control. For most societies, this has been the case throughout history. The ethical principles in the Sermon on the Mount are universal, but they are most appropriate for those in judicial bondage. Loving one's enemies is not a widely shared ethical principle among captive peoples. Conquerors cannot readily understand it; neither can revolutionaries.

Jesus was telling His listeners that they were captives of sin. This is the universal form of captivity among men. "Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34). The Greek word for "servant" can also be translated "slave," and in this passage, it should be. The way out of slavery is grace. It begins with God's common grace to all men. Without this, life would be impossible. Then He shows special grace. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). His people are a means of common grace. They are also a means of special grace. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Common grace is shown to all men by God through nature. Covenant-breakers take God's common grace for granted. They see it as only what they deserve. But common grace shown by enemies, they do not take for granted. They are moved to ask: "Why?" This question can serve as a first step to a correct answer. There are two possible correct answers: (1) "God loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life"; (2) "God hates me and has a horrible plan for my life." Nebuchadnezzar discovered the first answer (Dan. 4). Judas discovered the second answer. "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22).

E. Justice and the Free Market

Legal predictability is a foundation of the free market social order. So is equality before the law. Every person's property is protected by law from thieves and predators and government officials. The expectation

of justice allows men to reduce their expenditures on defending their property or hiding it. Social cooperation becomes less expensive.

The Bible requires the rule of law: one law for all. "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you" (Ex. 12:49).[11] This was not Roman jurisprudence. Jesus told His followers to treat all men justly, irrespective of the prevailing civil law. If obeyed, this law makes it more likely that Christians will gain cooperation from other people. Because of their law-abiding practices, Christians should gain access to a larger market than their competitors: production markets and retail markets. By lowering the risks of doing business with them, Christians are can lower their own costs of production.

Enemies can still do business with each other. This is a benefit. Doing business leads to greater peace. Becoming dependent on another's production raises the cost of breaking off the business relationship. By treating all men justly, Christians would gain the reputation as being low-risk associates. This would increase the number of opportunities offered to them.

In contrast is the practice of Christians' unwillingness to perform as promised on the basis of their demand for mercy, which is supposedly owed to the Christian on account of his unique legal position before God. The Christian who expects others to grant him mercy for poor performance is a man who is violating the rule of law. He is demanding a subsidy for his substandard performance. He is pressuring others to treat him as outside the rule of law. Word will get out that this man is a high-risk associate. His opportunities to extend the kingdom of God will therefore shrink.

Conclusion

The top priority in this passage is for God's people to pray for and treat justly all men, including their enemies. This is what sets God's people apart from other people. "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" God extends mercy and grace to all men in history; so should God's people. This mercy and grace brings some to repentance and others to destruction. It is up to God to determine which outcome results from His common grace. It is not up to men.

11. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

11

CHARITY GIVEN IN SECRET

> *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.*
>
> MATTHEW 6:1–4

The theocentric focus of this law is the fact that God gives rewards openly to those who give alms secretly for His sake: sanctions. This is point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Public Displays of Generosity

There is no doubt that there are rewards for giving charity. The question is: Who is the targeted source of the rewards? Is it men or God? Do alms-givers seek the praises of men or of God? There are rewards in history and eternity. The question is: Who gives these rewards? The answer that men give is revealed by their actions. If they give alms in public, then their reward is the praise of men. If they give alms in secret, then their reward is God's praise, possibly in history, but surely after the resurrection.

The message is clear: donors should not go to any expense in publicizing their personal charitable activities. This does not mean

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

that they may not announce the existence of their activities. If an institution exists to do charitable work, how will potential recipients learn of its existence if it remains entirely secret? How, for example, is a public foundation to give away its money if it cannot lawfully announce its existence? Only if it gives to "insiders," i.e., individuals or groups that are selectively informed by the informal information grapevine that money is available. The broader the organization's vision for giving, the more important it is for potential recipients of the money to present their needs to the organization. How can this be done in secret?

In the United States, a public foundation must report its activities and expenditures to the Internal Revenue Service. If it refuses, it loses its legal status as a tax-deductible organization. Those donating money to it will no longer be able to deduct this money from their taxable gross income. They will be taxed on it even though they gave it away. The tax authorities legally monitor the use of the money. The organization's funds must be used to support the charitable activities that it was set up to support.

What Jesus was condemning was a publicity campaign by the givers for the sake of the givers. To announce that a foundation gives away funds to certain causes is a legitimate reason to have a publicity campaign, although these costs should be minimized. The campaign may be used to gain both donations and outlets for the donated funds. It should be designed to attract more deserving recipients for the funds. It should not be designed to publicize the donors.

This is a reason why family names should not be placed on charitable organizations. When they give away money, this should not bring fame or good reputation to the families that set up these foundations. The Carnegie Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust, and all the other family-created foundations with family names on them violated this basic principle. Even William Volker, known posthumously as Mr. Anonymous,[2] violated this principle when he set up the Volker Charities in the early decades of the twentieth century.

There is another reason: well-funded non-profit organizations have almost always been taken over by people who hold opposite views from their founders, unless the founders were political liberals. The more conservative the donor and the larger the size of his

2. Herbert C. Cornuelle, *Mr. Anonymous: The Story of William Volker* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1951).

foundation's capital base, the faster it has been taken over by liberals. When Henry Ford II resigned from the liberal Ford Foundation in disgust in the mid-1970s, he admitted what had happened. Conservatives do not capture liberal foundations; liberals capture conservative foundations. Why? Because the educational institutions that produce the managers that run large bureaucracies are liberal. Another reason: liberals use long-term planning to infiltrate and capture rich or influential conservative organizations.[3]

B. Rewards as Positive Sanctions

This passage does not condemn the giving of charity for the sake of rewards. On the contrary, *it identifies personal rewards as the primary goal of charity*. Nothing here is said of the needs of the poor. The issue here is the source of the rewards: God or men. When the donor's goal is to gain the praises of men, he may very well receive this reward, but this is the only reward he will receive. Jesus condemns His opponents: "They have their reward." All they have is the praise of men. In eternity, this counts for nothing. It condemns rather than upholds.

The system of covenantal cause and effect in history and eternity is based on a system of rewards, i.e., sanctions. Point four of the biblical covenant model has to do with sanctions.[4] Without God's covenantal sanctions, men would be trapped in a universe where either impersonal chaos and chance or impersonal determinism would rule the affairs of man. In either case, meaning would have to be imputed by men to their environment, an environment beyond man's control. Either the environment would be too chaotic to control or too deterministic for man to be anything but a cog in a great machine.

Charity is a good thing because rewards are a good thing. The question is: How good are the rewards? Rewards from men's praise are a good thing, but not at the expense of rewards from God. Jesus made it plain here that the reward-seeker must choose between rewards. He must not seek both. By seeking God's reward, he may receive the praise of men as an unintended consequence. By seeking men's praise, the giver can be sure that he will not receive God's reward. The system of covenantal sanctions is clearly weighted on the side of seeking God's reward. The system, in the peculiar language of economists, is asymmetric. But, then again, God's creation is asymmetric.

3. Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996).

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 4; North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 4.

Even though it often appears as if it were asymmetric on the side of covenant-breakers, it isn't. It is on the side of covenant-keepers.[5]

There is no doubt that it is unwise to choose the praise of men when such praise negates the praise of God. To do so is to make a catastrophic choice, which is part of a more comprehensive system of choices: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).[6]

Seeking the praises of men is a variant of mammon worship.[7] Instead of seeking wealth, the donor seeks praise. Instead of serving the buyers in order to amass riches, he serves the objects of his charity. His goal is the same: personal rewards in history. He uses his talents in order to build up his supply of rewards in history. This is false worship. True worship has as its goal eternal rewards through service to God. Earthly rewards come as a consequence of service to men as surrogates for God (Matt. 25:34–40).

C. Uncoordinated Giving

"But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (v. 3). This is an odd saying. It sounds as though the proper approach to giving is some sort of indiscriminate handing out of funds. Is this what the passage means?

What Jesus is condemning is a system of giving which is calculated to gain the praise of men. The giver chooses his charities carefully in terms of a plan. This plan is designed to benefit the giver by enhancing his reputation as a charitable person. Everything the giver does is calculated to win him the praise of men. His giving is designed to buy him the praise of men.

Then is it wrong to design charitable giving plans in order to buy rewards? No, for Jesus says that a reward from God is a legitimate goal of charity. The question is: Who is the source of the rewards? It is a question of sovereignty. Who is the true God? Whose standards governing charity are sovereign? God is hidden from sight; men are in plain view. Should the giver seek his rewards from the invisible God or the visible gods? Jesus' answer is clear.

The command not to let the right hand know what the left hand is doing is a command for two-handed charity. Men should give away

5. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

6. Chapter 35.

7. Chapter 14.

alms with both hands. What Jesus was saying is that there should be no coordinated plan of giving—two-handed giving—if it involves making calculations regarding the praises of men.

God sets forth standards for covenantally faithful giving. First, giving should be structured to please God and thereby gain His rewards. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).[8] Second, it should be two-handed: generous, not to a fault, but to a benefit. Third, it should be for the sake of the recipients. If giving to a recipient who needs help but will not bring the praises of men, ignore the praises of men.

Conclusion

To give alms wisely requires a plan. Giving is not to be uncoordinated. The question is: Whose plan? The top priority of this passage is to identify the sovereign source of rewards for alms. That source is God, who sees in secret now and rewards in public: sometimes in history but always in eternity. The presumption is that God's rewards do not come immediately. Those who seek the praise of men already have their reward. God will publicly reward only faithful givers. This is future tense.

This forces men to act in faith: faith either in the near-term praise of men or the long-term praise of God. People give now, but they hope for praise. There is a time factor in making one's choice: immediate vs. indeterminate. There is also a source factor: men or God. Choose well which time frame and which God to serve, this passage warns us.

8. Chapter 13.

12

THE LORD'S PRAYER

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

MATTHEW 6:9–13

The theocentric focus of this passage is God, who answers prayer. It identifies God as the father of His people. He is personal. He is present with His people: point one of the biblical covenant.[1] As a father, He loves His children. They can come to Him in prayer without fear of reproach.

A. Corporate Prayer

This is a corporate prayer. Those marked by God's covenant sign of baptism are told to raise their voices to heaven. They publicly identify God as the one who dwells in heaven. He is above the earth. This implies that He is sovereign over the creation. The second identification is His name. It is hallowed, i.e., holy or set apart. Those who have been set apart by God are told to announce the set-apart status of God.

Then comes the first request: that God's kingdom will come. But it is already here. Jesus said: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt 12:28).[2] Then why must we pray that it come? Because that which is definitively here already is also progressively arriving. At some point, it will be here finally: at the last judgment. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:25–26).[3] By praying for the kingdom's advent, Christians extend the kingdom of God in history. They are praying for time to end, when heaven and earth will be equated morally.

This leads to the second request. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." God's will is for men to be ethically perfect. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The ethical perfection of heaven is to be progressively manifested in history: first, through individuals; second, through the institutions they influence. Men's obedience is one of the means by which God's kingdom comes. Obedience is the basis of dominion.[4]

Only when we have affirmed God's glory and holiness and have called for His kingdom's advent in history do we come to our requests for our own benefits.

B. Daily Bread

Before the advent of capitalism, hunger was a universal threat. "Give us this day our daily bread" was no idle refrain. The experience of hunger was familiar to all but a tiny handful of rulers and those who served them. Famine was always a possibility: too much rain, too little rain, locusts, etc. Famine was one of God's three primary corporate judgments. "When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence" (Jer. 14:12).

Bread is the symbol of the food which sustains life. Jesus contrasted God's word with bread as the staff of life. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4b).[5] This was an Old Testament doctrine (Deut. 8:3). Nevertheless, bread deserves its due. We are creatures. We must eat to live. Bread is a universally recognized food.

2. The parallel in Luke is unexpected: "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20).

3. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

4. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 3.

5. Chapter 1.

When covenant-keepers pray for bread, they are praying for life. They are asking God to enable them to survive another day. The token of God's favor is daily bread, just as the manna was in the wilderness. To pray for daily bread is not selfish. It acknowledges that God is the source of life, and that men are dependent on Him for their lives.

The modern capitalist order has produced bread in such abundance that this request has become more of a ritual than a serious request. Because God has provided the grace of the free market, a social institution that produces unprecedented wealth, He has already answered this prayer in the West. He has created the legal and social arrangements by which bread is supplied in abundance by third parties. The problem is, men no longer recognize the historical and cultural uniqueness of bread in abundance. They do not sense that they are in the presence of a miracle: an unplanned economic system by which most men will not starve in peacetime unless they are the targets of political oppression. Men fall into the trap of pretended autonomy which is described in the same chapter of Deuteronomy in which the warning against ignoring God's word in favor of bread appears. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18).[6]

The prayer for daily bread appears after the prayer takes men through the doctrine of God: His fatherhood, sovereignty, holiness, and righteousness. Those who affirm mentally what they have prayed for openly have both confessed and believed that this God is the source of bread. This is what God insists on. It is illegitimate to ascribe to man what has its source in God. This is a great evil of humanism, including modern free market theory. Economists ascribe to impersonal market forces and social arrangements that which God provides in His grace.

One of the most important teachings of modern economics is that the value of each additional unit of any scarce resource is less to the individual than the previous unit. This is the doctrine of declining marginal utility.[7] An application of this law is men's declining thank-

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

7. The assumption here is that tastes do not change. If tastes do change, this law is not always applicable. Certain addictive substances may be marked by increasing marginal utility for a time, as the addiction takes hold. Cigarettes are a good example.

fulness about bread. Men become less thankful for food as they become full. The enormous output of food in the modern world has left bread as a nearly ignored substance. It takes active mental discipline to pray this prayer meaningfully. Men must learn to thank God for the means of such massive production of bread, including the social order.

If bread were removed for a time, men would learn to pray this prayer enthusiastically. But that would be a time of judgment. The difficulty is to maintain the attitude of reverential subordination to the God who provides bread, the symbol of life. Men tend to forget God when they get rich. Wealth, which is a blessing of God for covenantal faithfulness (Deut. 28:1–14),[8] becomes a snare. Solomon said it best: "...give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8b–9). This is a prayer worth repeating. The lust for more food, like the lust for more money, is a mark of addiction. Solomon knew this, too. "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat. Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom" (Prov. 23:1–4). He had tasted many dainties. This had produced only vanity.

C. Forgiven Debts

The next request acknowledges that men are debtors. They are debtors above all to God, who sustains them, but they are also debtors to other men.

1. Broken Contracts

The familiar liturgical version of this prayer, "forgive us our trespasses," does not appear in this text or a parallel. The verses immediately following do mention trespasses: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14–15). The two words have similar applications, but "debts" is the more judicial language. The word conveys the idea of a contract. The one who prays the prayer is the guilty party. He

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

has broken the contract. But others have broken debt contracts with him. When covenant-keeping men forgive others, they are themselves forgiven by God. The debts to God are cancelled. Whatever amount was owed to the man in debt to God counts as a representative payment—a token payment—to God.

In some corporate sense, men can say, "we owe the debt to ourselves." But to say this, there must be a way to settle up the accounts, cancel all debts, and send everyone home a debt-free person. Only God can do this. Only He can settle all of the accounts. He alone can do this because of the magnitude of the debts owed to Him by all men. Whatever men owe to others is dwarfed by what they owe to God. They owe God everything, for His grace is the source of everything they own. He is therefore in a position to cancel any man's debts. This prayer asks God to cancel a person's debt to Him. God then asks him who prays to do the same, but on a much smaller scale.

What kind of debts are in view here? The context of the prayer is the sovereignty of a holy God. The context is ethics. Every person is in debt to God ethically. The debt is the equivalent of a trespass. We have broken God's laws. Others have broken His laws by injuring us. When we come to God asking for forgiveness for an ethical trespass, He asks us to do the same for others. But God does not ask us to forgive every trespass and every trespasser. He asks us to forgive those who ask for forgiveness, even as we ask God for forgiveness. Even as we may be asked to make a restitution payment to God, so they may be asked to make a restitution payment to us. And just as there are times when we cannot or will not make our restitution payment to God, yet still ask for His forgiveness, so sometimes are we to forgive those who make no restitution payment to us, yet still ask for our forgiveness.

2. A Token Payment

Restitution is basic to settling ethical debts, i.e., transgressions.[9] When a man calls on God to forgive him, he must be ready to make restitution. But He cannot pay God all of what he owes to God. His restitution payment is a token. When a transgressor calls on his victims to forgive him, he must be ready to make restitution. This restitution can involve lifetime servitude if he is a criminal. If he is a less flagrant debtor, he may owe money, service, or goods. But what if he

9. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43.

owes more than he can restore? Then he is in the same predicament that we are in with respect to God. This prayer reminds us that we can repay God by not demanding all of the restitution payment that is owed to us by some debtor. We accept a token payment from him, just as God accepts a token payment from us.

The token payment is important, however. It is a mark of humility, an admission that a larger debt is owed. It allows the debtor to admit his debt. He must ask for an act of grace on our part—an undeserved gift. After all, this is what God does for us. To ask God for forgiveness without offering any restitution payment is not to take seriously either the debt or the debt relationship.

The ultimate restitution payment was made by Jesus Christ on the cross. But this does not negate the necessity of a token payment. If we have sinned against another person, and we cry out to God for forgiveness, we must make restitution to our victim. If we have sinned against God, we can and should suffer some token loss. Under the Mosaic Covenant, this would have been an animal sacrifice (Lev. 6:6).[10] Under the New Covenant, it is a dedicated life: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1–2).[11] A life of full-time service is our token payment.

When we have given God everything, how can we give Him anything extra? How can we make a token payment if we have nothing to spare? By distinguishing between faithful service in general and faithful service in particular. We serve God when we make a profit. We also serve Him by giving things away. But the two forms of service are not equal. Giving things away is blessed spiritually. Jesus said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35b).[12] It takes spiritual discipline of a high order to internalize this fact and make it a way of life. So, when a man owes a debt to God, a good way to pay his token is to give something away to someone who can make good use of it. It is good for the recipient, and it is good practice for

10. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 7.

11. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

12. Gary North, *Sacrifice and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Acts*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

spiritual growth. The giver is the judge of what constitutes a meaningful token. It must not be too great, for man should never imagine that he can buy God's favor.[13] It must not be too small, persuading the believer that a trespass is a trifle. The token payment, like the punishment, should fit the trespass. The token mentioned here is our forgiveness of what others owe to us. We forgive a little to others; God forgives much to us.

3. A Web of Debt

Economic debt is a secondary application of this verse. Debt is here seen as a liability, something to be avoided, and if this is not possible, then forgiven. The modern world is now engulfed in an ocean of debt. Promises have been made that cannot be kept. In civil government and fractional reserve banking, these promises have made an entire civilization dependent on the continual expansion of debt in order to pay off past obligations, both political and economic. If either debt or economic growth should falter, the entire debt system will collapse in a wave of broken promises: bankruptcy. At this late date, the public's confidence in the social order is based on faith in an escalating supply of promises that cannot be kept.

The enormous wealth produced by the capitalist system has made the prayer for daily bread a formality. But the prayer for debt forgiveness has grown more relevant under capitalism, as the world's assets have been monetized through the banking system. People eat better than ever, but they are in debt for most of their lives. Debt has become a way of life. The burden of debt is not seen as much of a burden. But when economic depressions come, men feel the pressures of debt. This is why governments prefer to inflate. There are more debtors who vote for short-run debt relief through inflation than lenders who vote for monetary policies that offer long-term restrictions on money creation.

There is so much debt today that no one can calculate it or trace its effects. We live in a gigantic web of debt. The connections are subtle. Most capital assets for which there are organized markets have debts on them or on the institutions that own them. In the investment world, the threads of debt encompass every nook and cranny of the capital markets. No one has designed this system. It has evolved through the borrowing and lending decisions of individuals. It is an example of what Adam Ferguson two centuries ago described as

13. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 56; North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 1.

the product of human action but not of human design.[14] Should the credit system break down, due to a banking crisis, this will pull every institution down with it. Debt forgiveness—repudiation—will be accomplished through universal bankruptcy.

Our bread is produced by means of a debt-encumbered system of production. A breakdown in the credit markets would call into question the ability of all producers to get their products into the hands of customers. This applies to farmers above all. In the United States, about two percent of the population lives on farms. These people feed the rest of the nation and much of the world. Agriculture has always been heavily dependent on debt. But today's debt system extends beyond the farms into every aspect of the food chain. When men one day cry out in desperation, "forgive us our debts," God will grant them their request. But on the next day, they will be praying for their daily bread. The web of debt will be shred to pieces by the breakdown of the credit system, which means the breakdown of fractional reserve banking. The breakdown of the bank payments system will contract the division of labor: the interdependent system which puts bread on our tables, the economists insist. There will be less bread on our tables when all of our debts are forgiven in a massive wave of bankruptcies.

D. Deliverance

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." This is a call for guidance. To minimize the opportunities for sinning, men are to call upon God to keep them out of temptation. This is a call for a subsidy. Men should desire to smooth the crooked paths of life, to walk neither to the right nor to the left. "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:7–8).

Deliverance from evil implies that we are already trapped in the vice of sin or the devices of evil-doers. We got into the mess; now we

14. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), p. 187; cited by F. A. Hayek, "The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design" (1967), in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 96n.

want out. We call out for God to pull us out of the mire.

We seek a subsidy in both cases. We admit that we cannot achieve these goals in our own strength. The sinner acknowledges that he is a sinner. He does this so that he will be enabled to sin less. This is the kind of subsidy that God wants to provide. It is *a subsidy to righteousness*. Such a subsidy is a necessity in a world under the effects of original sin. Were it not for this subsidy, men would be totally depraved. Society would be like the pre-Flood civilization: fit for destruction. It could not continue. But God subsidizes righteousness for His glory's sake. This enables His people to extend His kingdom in history.

E. Kingdom, Power, and Glory

These are three marks of a king. God is here acknowledged to be the great king under whose authority all other kings operate. The Lord's prayer moves from God in heaven to God in history. Men are to pray their prayers of request as a means of achieving this extension of the kingdom from heaven to earth. We pray to the God of heaven for our daily bread, debt annulment, reduced temptations, and deliverance from evil so that we might better extend God's kingdom, power, and glory in history.

Our prayers for ourselves are sandwiched in between God's kingdom in heaven and His kingdom on earth. That which was definitive when Christ cast out demons becomes progressive through the prayers of His people.

The suggestion that God's kingdom has no institutional manifestation in civil government, yet does in church government and family government, is to restrict the reign of the king. Kingdom, power, and glory are thereby confined to the spheres of the voluntary. When magistrates bring civil sanctions, however, they are supposedly not allowed to see themselves as oath-bound covenantal agents of the God of the Bible. The kingdom of God is said to lack visible incorporation in the civil realm. There is neither formal power or public glory for God in the civil realm, according to modern political theory.

Forever is more than a long time. God's kingdom, power, and glory extend from history into eternity. This points to progressive sanctification in history, which will culminate in the defeat of death and the end of time (I Cor. 15:26). The prayers of Christians are to extend God's kingdom, glory, and power in history.

This implies a goal of victory in history: *the replacement of Satan's kingdom by God's*. This is *social sanctification*. This is not exclusively a

trans-historical sanctification; it must also be historical. The request to have God's will done on earth as well as in heaven testifies to the historical frame of reference.[15]

There is continuity between today's kingdom, power, and glory and tomorrow's. This continuity is manifested by the prayers of God's people—above all, the Lord's prayer. As surely as His people pray today for daily bread and their deliverance from evil, so have other sons prayed in the past and will pray in the future. *The continuity provided by this prayer points to the continuity of God's kingdom, power, and glory in history*. If men expect their prayers for bread and deliverance to be answered, then they must expect progressive personal sanctification. Similarly, when they pray the closing words, they must expect to see God's kingdom, power, and glory to persevere in history. But if there is no expansion, then what kind of a kingdom is it? What kind of power will He exercise? What kind of glory will be His? He exercises power representatively, through mankind. To pray this prayer is to pray for the regeneration of mankind. This may take millennia, but it will not take forever.

Conclusion

The Lord's prayer moves from heaven to earth and from the present into eternity: forever. It proclaims a comprehensive kingdom of God in history, which extends into eternity. It calls for an ethical subsidy to covenant-keepers, which is a subsidy to the progressive establishment of God's kingdom. Such a subsidy is necessary to offset, let alone overcome, original sin.

God offers us bread for the asking. He offers forgiveness of our debts. We, in turn, are to forgive the debts of others. Our forgiveness is a token payment to God for what we owe him. The debts here are moral debts: violations of God's law. To a lesser extent, they are economic debts. The message is clear: don't build up debts to others, either moral or economic.

The top priority of this passage is the power of corporate prayer in transforming history, to bring history into conformity to eternity's standards. The kingdom of God is at the beginning and end of this prayer. The kingdom of God provides the context of our daily bread and our mercy: received and extended.

15. Are we to imagine that God requires the church to pray corporately ("Our Father," not "My Father") for something that can never come to pass? Yet this is the teaching of amillennialism.

13

INCORRUPT TREASURE

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

MATTHEW 6:19–21

The theocentric principle here is God as the rewarder of those who diligently serve Him: sanctions, which is point four of the biblical covenant.[1] "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

A. The Goals of Treasure-Builders

This passage proclaims the superiority of eternity over time. That which we lay up for ourselves on earth is subject to risk. That which we do for the cause of God will surely last. Time is not a reliable vault for treasure. Things can change overnight that destroy the best-laid plans of men. Where should men put their faith? Not in things temporal.

The passage forbids laying up treasures on earth for ourselves. Two things are involved here: self-aggrandizement and time. The person who amasses wealth on earth is too short-sighted. He is also too risk-oriented. He is building up capital that may be lost and will surely

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

be useless to the capitalist after his death. The post-funeral question, "How must did he leave behind?" has a universal answer: "All of it."

The passage does not condemn treasure left behind for one's heirs or one's favorite causes. Inheritance is too prominent a theme in the Bible for any such conclusion. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22). The inter-generational transfer of wealth is basic to fulfilling the dominion covenant. The long-term growth of capital in the hands of covenant-keepers is one aspect of the extension of the kingdom of God in history.

What is condemned is the amassing of wealth for oneself. It reveals a false religion: faith in man and faith in time. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11). The wealth that men accumulate on earth is a temptation to other men. Thieves break in. Rust corrupts. The erosion of value, like the erosion of life, threatens all forms of wealth except perhaps gold, which does not rust. But gold is a favorite target of thieves. And it can be lost.

Why do men build treasures? No single answer exists. The quest for safety from the unknown, the desire for recognition—a name—the delight in the challenge of wealth accumulation as a game: all of these have motivated men. But death comes to every man. If all that matters is what other men impute to you and your works—recognition, fame, respect, net asset value—then your work is dependent on the wisdom of other men. Those who impute value to your works are mortal. Death is the great leveller. The Preacher wrote:

> Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it. For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing,

> neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun (Eccl. 8:17–9:6).

If death makes all things the same, then mortality threatens all meaning, all differentiation. The good and the bad in history end the same way. If there is no immortal agent who imputes meaning to that which is temporal and therefore mortal, then there is no permanent meaning. Everything is vanity.

What truly matters, Jesus warned, is not exclusively material. He who rests his faith on that which can be accumulated on earth has placed his trust in a weak god.

B. Treasures of the Heart

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." This is a profound insight. What a man values most captures his heart. He dreams of it, plans his life in terms of it, and sacrifices for it. Treasure captures men. Men dream of buried treasure, yet treasures bury men. Men whose dreams are in things have been captured by these things, metaphorically speaking. Their desires restructure their lives. The focus of their desires is temporal. This cuts them off from treasures in eternity.

To dream, plan your life, and sacrifice for the sake of treasures in heaven are marks of one's subordination to God and one's future-orientation. Those who accumulate treasures in heaven by forfeiting consumption in history are radically future-oriented and therefore radically upper class.[2] It takes faith to do this. It requires trust in Jesus' doctrine of the world of heaven and the post-resurrection new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21). Jesus made it clear that a man's heart is captured by his treasure. It is as if treasures had cords attached to them that stretch out and ensnare a man's heart. Men are either pinned to the earth or pulled into heaven by these cords. *Their treasures define where their dreams are*. The implication is that as we build ever-larger treasures, these cords become more binding. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:23–24).[3]

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2. Edward Banfield, *The Unheavenly City* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 48–50. On the middle class, see pp. 50–53. On the lower class, see pp. 53–59.

3. Chapter 38.

Nothing in this passage implies that it is wrong for men to store up treasures for themselves. What Jesus warned against was earthly treasures. To pursue righteousness for the sake of an eternal reward is wise. Paul wrote: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13–14). Sacrifice in the present for the sake of a future reward reveals where our hearts are.

Jesus also said: "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. 12:35). Here we see another variation of the same theme. There are distinctions between treasures. There are incorrupt treasures as well as corrupt treasures. A good treasure of the heart brings forth good things. It leads men toward greater righteousness.

Where is your heart? Where your treasure is. Jesus made it clear that treasures on earth are a snare and delusion. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

C. Capital Accumulation

Then what of tools? Are not tools a means of extending man's dominion over the earth? Tools are capital: the product of labor and land over time.[4] Tools require reduced consumption in the present in order to construct them. There is nothing in Jesus' words to suggest that men should not strive to gain greater mastery over the creation by means of thrift, which is required to build tools. Then how can we ethically sort out treasure from tools?

Treasure implies a final reward. It is the end of one's production—"end" in terms of one's goal and also in terms of one's chronology. It is a *final consumer good*: the cessation of production. The vision of the miser, surrounded by boxes of gold coins, is accurate. Even better would be the miser buried with his gold—an unlikely event, as all the pharaohs' graves save one indicate.[5] It is the story of King Midas, whose touch transformed his daughter into gold: the touch

4. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), ch. 7:4–5.

5. King Tut was a minor pharaoh whose tomb was so insignificant that the grave robbers lost track of it.

of death. Treasure in heaven implies an end to one's earthly striving, an end to one's earthly production. It implies the individual's completion of his term of service in history. To sacrifice in history for the sake of consumption in eternity is not the touch of death. It is the opposite. Men are to strive to build up *capital*, not treasure. They are to build up an *inventory of tools for dominion*.

The great threat of capital accumulation is that it can become earthly treasure in men's hearts. The misery of Scrooge, in Dickens' story, "The Christmas Carol," is the outcome of capital transformed into treasure. Scrooge and Marley were good businessmen, but their accumulation of capital ensnared them. The chains on Marley's ghost were the product of the cords that had bound him to earthly treasure. Dickens' story is a secularized account of a man's regeneration. Scrooge is initially given two supernatural visions: what he had been and what he is. He has become bound ever-more tightly by the cords of the great god More. Then, in the third vision, he sees the result: a sparsely attended funeral and a home stripped of its few valuable treasures by thieves. But what if his funeral had been attended by kings and his home transformed into a world-famous museum? He would have been just as dead. What a corrupt man imputes in his autonomy is death: the dead burying the dead (Matt. 8:22).

The movie *Citizen Kane* is sometimes heralded as the greatest movie ever made. This is not my assessment, but its considerable power is derived from this same theme: the vanity of treasure. The real-life model of Kane, William Randolph Hearst, did accumulate a vast art collection—so much that he lost track of what he had. His collection was piled up in boxes. He had his agents search for one piece of art for years, and they discovered that it resided in his boxed collection. The movie's power was in its brilliant ending. His verbalized treasure in the last moments of his life, seen at the beginning of the movie, was something or someone called Rosebud. No one ever learned what it was. The next to last scene shows workers tossing piles of junk into a furnace, and one item was a child's winter sled: "Rosebud." The final scene is a column of smoke ascending from the chimney. "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (I Cor. 3:12–13).[6]

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

D. How Literal Is This Warning?

Was Jesus using hyperbole, or was He establishing guidelines? Was He really against the amassing of valuables that serve as consumption items rather than tools? Was He calling on those, like Hearst, who build their own personal treasure hoards to open them to the public? I think He was. The best Christian example of this in the United States is the art collection assembled by Bob Jones, Sr., for Bob Jones University: the finest collection of late medieval and early modern religious paintings anywhere in the United States and possibly on earth. He assembled this collection immediately after World War II, when prices were low because of the poverty of the victims. The collection is now worth more than the physical grounds of the university. Yet it can be toured for free. But very few people know of its existence. Visitors are few.

What of the woman who buys a few lovely items to enjoy and to leave to her daughters? What of the lover of antiques? The answer depends on the heart of the collector—the extent of his love. Is the collection his passion? Is it his consuming fire? Then it is his treasure. He should sell it or give it to some institution open to the public. Its cords are too binding. "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:21–23).[7]

Conclusion

In the final analysis, treasure is whatever one's god bestows on his servant for a lifetime of faithful service. He who strives for earthly treasure serves a finite god. This god may be other men, or a cause, or a demon, or oneself. But a god that can bestow only earthly treasure is not the God of the Bible.

The top priority here is the accumulation of treasure in heaven: the reward bestowed by God on His faithful servants when their work is finished. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work

7. Chapter 38.

shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:11–15).[8]

There is an allocation problem here. Wealth spent to build one's personal earthly treasure cannot simultaneously be used in kingdom service that builds a heavenly treasure. This is why the Christian walk involves the exercise of judgment. Capital can become treasure. Tools can become an end. Anything that ends in history can become a treasure that binds its accumulator with heavy cords.

The inheritance in heaven is strictly individual. It cannot be familistic. There is no marriage in heaven (Matt. 22:30).

8. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

14

RIVAL MASTERS, RIVAL KINGDOMS

> *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*
>
> MATTHEW 6:24–25

The theocentric focus of this passage is service to God: hierarchy, which is point two of the biblical covenant.[1] A person must serve either God or mammon. He has no third option. There is no neutrality. The legitimate goal is service to God.

A. What Is Mammon?

Mammon is man's greed. The Greek word can also be translated "confidence." *Of all false gods in history, mammon is by far the most common*. Men trust in the things that they accumulate. They place their confidence in things. That is to say, they worship aspects of the creation that they seek to place under their authority. What do I mean by worship? Above all, I mean *sacrifice*. That to which you give your life—your time, your dreams, your reputation—is your god. You invest your emotions and efforts in this god. You also expect something in return. It might be happiness, pleasure, fame, power, respect, or any of mankind's long list of personal goals. Men sacrifice to their gods for the sake of rewards—positive sanctions. *A god that offers no re-*

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

wards is not taken seriously. Men ask themselves, "What's in it for me?" Then they decide which god to worship.

The worship of any god involves making estimates. Which rewards are worth sacrificing for? Which are actually available? What is the likelihood of non-payment by the god? What is the past performance of the god in question? How much is expected of me? What happens if I promise to pay, but fail to deliver?

Then there is the question of loyalty. Is there a bond other than legal between man and his god? Is there a personal relationship? Is there grace? Does a god extend mercy to his worshippers?

But there can be no question of service. *A god that has no servants is not a god*. To gain what man wants from his god, he must serve. He may receive something for nothing from a gracious god, but not every-thing for nothing. No god extends all of his blessings gratuitously. Jesus made this plain in this passage: choose wisely which god to serve.

B. Jealous Gods

The Mosaic Covenant repeatedly warned men that the God of the Bible is a jealous God. "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex. 20:5).[2] "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Ex. 34:14). "For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God" (Deut. 4:24). "God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies" (Nahum 1:2). He tolerates the worship of no rival gods.

Jesus made it plain in this passage that the gods in question need not be idols or demons or the fantasies of men. *All rival gods boil down to one: mammon*. They may be supernatural gods, or gods of the marketplace, but they must offer men rewards for service. Men pursue their own goals through service to something that can reward them. The God of the Bible can reward men. On their own authority, rival gods promise to reward men. This promise is a lie. These other gods are nothing apart from the one true God. They are all creatures. They posses no autonomous authority. They have only the scraps of power which God grants to them for His own purposes.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

God and mammon are mutually exclusive, Jesus warned. Neither god tolerates the claims of the other. Each comes before man with a claim: "Worship only me, and I will reward you." The God of the Bible makes His claim exclusive. Mammon excludes only God, because God excludes mammon. God and mammon do not tolerate each other's claims. God's exclusivism is intolerable for mammon. Mammon's polytheism is intolerable for God. Mammon may publicly invite men to worship both him and God, but the invitation is spurious. Mammon treats God as if God were one among many. God rejects all such challenges to His exclusive authority.

So, men face a decision. In which god will they put their trust? Which will they serve faithfully in their quest for rewards? Which god's name will be on their tongues and in their hearts? They cannot serve both. If they attempt to serve both, they will alienate both.

C. Worship as Freedom from Worry

Jesus said: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (v. 25). This is odd language. One goal of worship is to gain rewards. Here is Jesus, telling His listeners that they should take no thought about what they shall possess, from life itself to food, drink, and clothing. Did He mean that such things are not important? On the contrary, they are very important. Life is surely important, and life is sustained by food, drink, and clothing. What is *not* important, He said, is *worrying* about such matters. It does no good to worry, for neither man nor mammon has any ability to gain them on his own authority or by his own efforts.

> Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things (Matt. 6:26–32).

Our Father in heaven knows our needs. Is this not enough? When He calls us into His service, He will provide the tools of this service. The tools of service are the very rewards that men seek. Conclusion: seek to serve; stop seeking the tools of service. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:33–34).[3] This passage lays it on the line. *Our first priority should be the kingdom of God*. This is what we are supposed to seek. All the other things that are presented before us as objects worth seeking are afterthoughts, or better put, *tools of more effective service*. They come as part of God's program of world-wide dominion. *Because God demands complete servitude, He provides us with the implements of comprehensive service*. All of these things shall be added unto us as rewards for faithful service. But everything that we receive from God adds to our responsibility. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48b).[4] We *receive more* in order that we can *achieve more*. The kingdom of God thereby extends its influence across the earth.

An expanding kingdom implies growth and development in history. *As the kingdom of God grows, it extends the division of labor*. More hands and minds are brought into His kingdom. More servants mean greater wealth for every servant, for population growth allows greater output per unit of resource input. This is the blessing of the division of labor. As dedicated servants of God are added to the kingdom, day by day, the kingdom gains knowledge and wealth, as the newcomers bring their skills and capital in with them. The wealth of the kingdom increases. This means that there is less and less to worry about. *The safety net of God's kingdom is there to catch any covenant-keeper if he falls*.

Worrying about a lack of food and raiment is like worrying about one's lack of height. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" It does no good to worry about such matters. God is the source of all of these blessings. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall

3. Chapter 15.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." These are among the most difficult words in the Bible to accept emotionally. When we find someone who lives in terms of them, we generally refer to the person as a saint. Yet Jesus spoke these words to a crowd, not to an intimate circle of initiates. He made it clear that all of His followers are to cease worrying about their economic condition. *The greater their faith, the less their worry*. The mark of an immature faith is worry about economic matters, or even life-and-death sickness, "o ye of little faith." It is all in God's hands. God is sovereign; man is not. God is sovereign; mammon is not.

D. The Religion of More For Me

Mammon has a kingdom. This religion is the religion of never-ending more for me in history. He who worships at the shrine of more for me in history can never be satisfied. He is addicted to more as a heroin addict is addicted to heroin. C. S. Lewis once wrote that it would be a terrible curse to eat food that makes us hungry. Yet mammon's food is precisely this kind of hunger-producing food.

In the 1970s, there was a television commercial for a brand of potato chip in which Burt Lahr, the actor who became famous as the cowardly lion in *The Wizard of Oz*, was dressed in a devil's suit. He holds a bag of the potato chips. He reaches in and takes one out. "Bet you can't eat just one," he says to the viewer. The imagery implied evil—forbidden fruit. Yet it was a light-hearted ad; it used a lovable comedian as the devil. It implied that it was perfectly all right to eat more than one. How much more, the ad did not say. But if you are in business to sell potato chips, you surely want to get people to eat more than one chip per sitting. The advertising jingle for Schaeffer's beer had a similar message: "Schaeffer's . . . is the . . . one beer to have . . . when you're having more than one!"

God has a kingdom. It grows over time. God's religion is the religion of *temporally bounded* more. God wants his kingdom to expand to the ends of the earth. Sin reigns nowhere that is not God's target for escalating victory. God seeks the redemption of sinners. As part of this goal, he provides His people with tools. They can use more tools. The spread of the gospel is not achieved free of charge. We live in a world of scarcity.

Then in what way is *mammon's religion of more* different from *God's religion of more*? In many ways. First, God's offer of more is trans-historical. He offers communion with Him in eternity, a world beyond

time. This goal is extremely future-oriented. Second, God's goal has a time limit: the final judgment (Rev. 20:14–15). Technically, so does mammon's: the heat death of the universe, i.e., absolute zero. But this theoretical event is so far into the future that it might as well be endless temporal succession. Third, God's goal is His own glory. To achieve this, He grants grace to men: something for nothing. Mammon's deceptive goal is the glory of man, either collectively or individually. In fact, greed destroys men. It is Satan's seductive tool. Satan grants something for something and sometimes nothing for something, if he can get away with it. But he never grants something for nothing except as bait to lure men to destruction.

The ultimate reward is eternal life. Compared to this, gaining the whole world for oneself is less than nothing. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). So, the biblical pursuit of more has limits. We are warned that even if more meant everything in history, it would not be enough to compensate us for the loss of communion with Him in eternity. This puts the goal of "more" into proper perspective. If everything is insufficient, more for man has temporal limits. Life is not unbounded.

It is sometimes said that men's desires are unbounded—infinite. Better put, given the limits on each man's life, his unfulfilled desires are beyond his means. At a lower price, he will buy more. But his greatest desire—more time—is surely bounded. He who forgets this fact in making daily decisions is a fool.

> And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16–21).[5]

The desires of men are not limitless; they are merely beyond men's means. Everything finite is bounded. Creation is finite. It is beyond our ability to measure, but God measures it. So, mammon's religion of more is ultimately a religion of man's deification. It is a religion of "more for me in history." It is an assertion of each man's divinity.

5. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 25.

E. Rival Economic Orders

The man who worships God legitimately seeks rewards for himself, but this must be in the context of better service to God. *Service to God through the creation is the mark of his salvation*. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10).

Free market economic theory relies on an analogous insight. A man gains what he wants by selling to others. He must offer something they want in exchange for something he wants. Each party gains from the transaction. Most free market transactions are not zero-sum transactions.[6] They are not examples of "I win; therefore, you lose." A representative of one spiritual kingdom can lawfully do business with a representative of the other kingdom. Both parties benefit. Both parties expand their wealth. Each party extends his god's kingdom. God can afford to let Satan extend his kingdom in this way because of the eschatological structure of inheritance. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22). God's people ultimately inherit the earth.[7]

Satan cannot be equally magnanimous to God. Eschatology is against him. He is running out of time. Satan operates with stolen goods. He is a squatter in history. He lured Adam into a transfer of allegiance and therefore a transfer of assets, but Adam owned nothing of his own. He was merely a designated steward of God's assets. So, *mammonism is inherently a religion of theft: stealing from God to benefit man*. It is self-centered greed. Its ultimate goal is "more for me and less for you." One man grows in stature by exceeding his fellows. While he may pursue "more for me and more for you, too" in the short run through voluntary exchange, he ultimately seeks to convert these gains into capital for covenant-breaking conquest. The religion of autonomy seeks to enslave others or kill them. This is what autonomy means: "The world serves me at its expense."

6. An exception is a commodity futures transaction, where one investor gains at the expense of the other, and the broker gains from both.

7. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

Conclusion

Serving God means learning to be content with whatever God supplies today. The faithful man thinks, "there is more where this came from." God will supply the tools that His people require for service to Him. These tools include such things as life, food, drink, and clothing. This outlook was the basis of Paul's warning:

> For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (I Tim. 6:7–11).[8]

What do covenant-keepers need? Whatever God gives them. No more than this? No more. Later, they may receive more, for the kingdom's sake and the covenant's confirmation. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).[9]

What do men want? Usually, they want more than God has given to them. In the modern world, where the worship of economic growth is the most widely practiced religion, men want far more than what God has given to them. They are trapped on mammon's treadmill to oblivion. Their religion is expressed on a humorous tee-shirt: "He who dies with the most toys, wins." Substitute any aspect of the creation for "toys," and the meaning is the same. It is a false religion. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The top priority in this passage is service to God, which is also its theocentric principle. The mark of this priority in our lives is contentment with whatever wealth God has provided. What must be avoided at all costs is service to mammon: the god of "more for me." This god of man's self-confidence and accumulation is a false god—*the* false god. It is the worship of man's would-be autonomy and therefore his would-be divinity. Men place confidence in the things they can accu-

8. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10.

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

mulate. They sacrifice their lives to the accumulation of things. Yet the things that were supposed to serve man become his slave-drivers. Like Pharaoh's task-masters, these dumb idols cry out: "More! More! We demand more!" Most of all, they demand more of men's time, the irreplaceable resource.

15

ALL THESE THINGS

> *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*
>
> MATTHEW 6:31–34

The theocentric focus of this passage is the rewards: sanctions, which is point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Faith as a Method of Risk-Reduction

How do we seek God's kingdom? How do we seek God's righteousness? This passage does not say. Jesus had already outlined the answer to these two questions in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the context of this passage, covenant-keepers are said to be able legitimately to expect to receive something that they would not have received, had they not had faith. The context is food, drink, and clothing. The person who trusts in God is supposed to trust that he will not fall into any form of adversity that cannot be overcome through God's intervention.

The language of this text makes it plain: *do not resist when all these things are added unto you*. The desire to gain all these things—the basics of life—is legitimate. But the means are not widely understood:

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

seeking first the kingdom of God. The ethical imperative is to seek the kingdom. The result of this quest is the ownership of those assets that preserve peace of mind. To begin with the search for the things that provide safety is to miss the nature of economic cause and effect.

Men save money or make personal contacts so that they can call upon these reserves in times of adversity. This is a form of thrift. Men rely on these things in order to overcome the unforeseen events of life that upset their plans unpleasantly. They do not mind having their plans upset by good news. It is bad news that scares them. They cannot see the future, so they accumulate savings to protect them.

This passage indicates that a program of capital accumulation to deal with unforeseen adversity is not nearly so important as extending the kingdom of God in history. Capital that might otherwise have been invested in an insurance program or retirement program can be used to fund missionaries or some other kingdom-building venture. The kingdom grows at the expense of the forfeited investment.

The text does not say that either capital or insurance is not worthwhile. It says that all these things shall be added unto the investment in kingdom expansion. What things? Food, drink, and clothing—things we really need. But what about things we want? That depends. Why do we want them? Because they make our lives more pleasant? Because they make us more productive? Because they will enable us to do more for God's kingdom? Our wants must be as kingdom-driven as our needs—in fact, even more so. Our needs do not readily identify us uniquely as covenant-keepers or covenant-breakers. Our wants do.

When the price of anything is reduced, more of it is demanded. By *reducing worry* about the future, this promise enables kingdom-builders to *bear more risk* with whatever capital they possess. They can afford to pass up an investment opportunity because there is always another that will come along. Covenant-keepers have access to supernaturally supplied reserves. They can therefore afford to commit more resources to their efforts in kingdom-building than they otherwise would have committed. This faith in God is supposed to *release assets for kingdom-building* that would otherwise have been reserved for risk-reduction or capital accumulation.

This raises an important issue. There is no doubt that enormous amounts of capital are invested in pension funds today. Pension funds in modern America are huge pools of capital. This capital is used to fund economic growth. Capital provides present employment for the sake of future income for the investors. What if men reduced their

commitment to thrift for the sake of charitable, kingdom giving? Would this reduce economic growth?

If other things remained equal, it would. But other things are not equal. God is ready to defend covenant-keeping individuals and societies. For example, individuals and societies will make fewer errors if men adhere to faith in God and the discipline of the tithe. I can think of no statistical way to prove this, but the presumption of the text is that worry regarding the economic future is forbidden to the covenant-keeper who prays, tithes, and does his work well. If he seeks protection from unforeseen adversity, he must begin with faith in God's providential decree, not capital accumulation. In this decree, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28b).[2]

There is an old secret of gaining wealth: don't make mistakes. The investments need not produce a high rate of return if the investor makes no mistakes. Any rate of growth, if unbroken, eventually produces a base that approaches infinity as a limit. This is the exponential curve in action.[3] The secret of wealth, generation after generation, is the strategy outlined by the Christian real estate investor, John Schaub: making it big on little deals. The difficult part is avoiding bad investments.

Kingdom projects are not always profit-seeking enterprises. Their success cannot be judged by a profit-and-loss statement. Yet, considered as a unit, they do produce a positive rate of return. They make society better. Money invested in them produces a positive eternal return for the investor, whether they succeed or fail in history. They constitute a kind of insurance policy for society. They reduce social risk. The differences between a kingdom project and an insurance policy are these: there is no legally binding contract with kingdom giving; there is no verifiable law of large numbers operating that will insure a fixed rate of return or reduction of risk; there is no identifiable pool of capital reserves to draw on in case of project failures. But there is promise made by God, the Creator. There is a pool of capital assured by the Owner of the universe. There is no legally fixed rate of return, but there is a positive rate of return. The text guarantees this.

It is a question of trust. Should we trust bank statements or God's promise? Should we trust digital wealth or God's promises?

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

3. Gary North, "The Theology of the Exponential Curve," *The Freeman* (May 1970), reprinted in Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), ch. 8.

We are back to the issue of God or mammon. Men place their faith in would-be autonomous institutions at their peril. Ultimately, the things of this world cannot completely insure us against the disasters that this world brings. We must begin with faith in God. Then all these things, including insurance and pensions funds, will be added.

John Wesley's Sermon 50, *The Use of Money* (1744), on Luke 16:9[4], is divided into three imperatives: gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can. Men are to allocate their funds wisely. Wesley was a great believer in thrift, as were the English Methodists generally in the eighteenth century. But this imperative to save money through the reduction of frivolous expenses was to be tempered by the command to give. Men are not to pursue the god of More.

B. Outside, Looking In; Inside, Looking Out

To whom was Jesus speaking? Were His words aimed at all of His listeners? Or were they aimed at a different group?

1. The Jews

Jesus' visible audience for this sermon was the Jews. They should have been vaguely familiar with the doctrine of the kingdom of God. But this doctrine is not prominent in the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant kingdom was Israel. It was not thought to extend beyond Israel's borders. David did speak of God as ruler of a kingdom. God's kingdom was what entitled David to his kingdom. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Ps. 45:6–7). But the only reference to the kingdom of God on earth was prophetic: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). Jesus was announcing that the time had arrived. The fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy was at hand.

The Jews were about to become outsiders, looking in. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). He was warning them here to seek first God's kingdom. But where was it

4. "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9).

to be found? In Jesus' ministry. "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). Paul later wrote: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17).

Seeking the kingdom meant seeking God's righteousness. Men can become progressively righteous because God is perfectly righteous. "For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). This was Jesus' message about the kingdom to those outside the kingdom.

2. The Disciples

For those inside the kingdom—His disciples—He spoke in greater detail. Matthew 13 is the great chapter regarding the kingdom. The emphasis in this chapter is on the kingdom's expansion in history. "And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" (Matt. 13:3–8).[5] In good soil, the seed would flourish.

"Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. 13:33).[6] The kingdom would expand like yeast, filling the loaf.

Jesus was speaking to insiders. This was why He spoke in parables. This was a fulfillment of prophecy.

> And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they

5. Chapter 27.
6. Chapter 30.

> seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them (Matt. 13:10–17).[7]

The disciples were being prepared to direct a program of worldwide conquest. They were looking outward toward the world: the kingdom of mammon. This enormous task would require capital. This would not be a major problem: "all these things shall be added unto you."

There would first be a preliminary trial run inside Israel. "And he called unto him the 12, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:7–13). Then, just before His crucifixion, He gave them to a new assignment: the worldwide extension of the kingdom. It had different rules. "And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22:35–36). This time, they would require capital. They had capital in one form; he told them to convert it into a new form suitable for traveling.

The first stage of conquest required no physical capital. This was analogous Israel's dependence on the manna in the wilderness. The second stage would require capital. This was comparable to the con-

7. Chapter 27.

quest of Canaan. Manna had proved to Israel that God was with them. So did the first stage of evangelism. But, once proven, there was need of capital. They had some already; they would have more, as needed. All these things would be added unto them.

C. Tools of Dominion

The ultimate tools of dominion are God's laws.[8] But we need food and clothing to do our work. Of course, this food and clothing may be minimal. "And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey" (Matt. 3:4). What about a roof over our heads? What about bricks and mortar? Nice, but not required, at least not in the early stages of a campaign. "And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20).[9]

What the disciples had learned in three years of wandering is that they could do without their own homes. They ate. They did not freeze to death. They lived off the generosity of others. They got by. They had the tools they needed to do their work.

This is the context of the promise that all these things would be added unto them. Jesus told the crowd this, but He taught it first-hand to the disciples. The crowd did not wish to follow Him. They were interested in hearing a lecture. They were not ready to sell everything and follow Him. They were still outside, looking in.

The governing presumption of this passage is that men should seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In this search, they will be given the capital they require to continue their search. But they probably have the capital already, just as the disciples had. Jesus had to tell them not to take a purse on stage one. This presumes that they had purses and money. They had to leave their tools behind. They had to learn how to live off the land, i.e., live off of the equivalent of manna. God would provide them with whatever they needed. The same was true of His listeners. They were burdened with too much capital. It was an impediment to their search. "The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in

8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

9. Chapter 19.

heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions" (Matt. 19:20–22). What the young man lacked was poverty. Jesus was trying to teach the young man that all that he needed to follow Jesus would be added. First, he had to cease trusting in his own wealth. But the young man was not yet ready to go into the wilderness and become dependent on the charity of others. He chose to remain an outsider, looking in.[10]

Once men experience the inner workings of the kingdom, they become insiders, looking out. Then they are allowed to carry their purses, and a sword, too. They have already learned the lesson of dependence on God. Having learned this, they are to carry purses, which God fills as required. Required by what? By the work of the kingdom.

The point is not that God promises to provide all the things we want. *He promises to provide all the things we need to carry out our portion of His kingdom plan*. We are to be content with whatever he provides that enables us to do His kingdom work. Anything more than this is ours to keep, but is not guaranteed. We are allowed to enjoy more than what we need to carry out His work. The tithe shows us just how much more than this we are allowed to keep.

D. The Tithe

God initially funds His own kingdom. He provides the initial capital, just as He did for Adam. Under men's administration, the kingdom begins to grow. It throws off additional capital. Men are allowed to keep 90% of this. The tithe is man's reinvestment—a minimal commitment. Special people, such as missionaries, invest more. They are kept in the field by the tithes of others. The missionaries invest time, the irreplaceable resource. This is the greatest commitment open to men, with martyrdom at the top: the forfeiture of time.

God does not under-fund His kingdom. His people may, however. They choose not to tithe. They refuse to give offerings above the tithe. They waste the assets entrusted to them. They lose their original vision. But the kingdom expands nevertheless. God finds new people with a better sense of purpose to continue His work. The others become outsiders, looking in.

The tools will be provided by God. What is in short supply is good men, not money. *What holds back a ministry is not the lack of money*

10. Chapter 38.

but the lack of vision or common sense. It is extremely difficult to teach Christian volunteers this principle, even as it is difficult to teach them to tithe.

The tithe teaches people that they are not autonomous, that they cannot achieve their goals through money alone. They take a token 10% and give it to the local church.[11] This token payment symbolizes their complete dependence on God. The tithe also supports the institutional church. It provides the tools needed to extend the work.

The principle of compound growth tells us that any base figure, no matter how low the rate of growth, eventually becomes exponential and approaches infinity as a limit. This is a fundamental principle of the kingdom. It eventually fills the earth. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

As the kingdom grows, the division of labor inside its boundaries increases. Its tasks increase in complexity. It throws off more wealth as output increases. As God's people faithfully work out their salvations with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), they experience the effect of compound growth. They have more capital to work with.

At this point, two things can happen. First, men can reinvest more, and the rate of economic growth increases. Second, they can consume more, and their lifestyle gets softer and more pleasant. Their tastes change. They find things to buy and dream about buying that their forebears would not have imagined possible, let alone impossible to live without. We would imagine that as residents in God's kingdom get richer, they would give a larger percentage to God's work. Modern economics teaches that as we receive more income, we allocate the marginal income to less valuable items on our scale of values. But this insight applies perfectly only in a hypothetical world in which there is no time, and tastes do not change. But tastes do change as income changes. The problem is addiction. Men begin to worship at the shrine of the great god More. They become mammonites. The more they get, the more they want. The more their neighbors get, the more they want. The kingdom of God slips lower on their list of priorities. God no longer receives 10% "off the top." He receives whatever is left over after the more important expenditures are made.

11. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

Thus, men lose their vision or their forefathers' vision. Society grows wealthier, and so do its residents. But this new wealth alters their tastes. It alters their priorities. The array of prices changes. Things that had never seemed possible to buy now become affordable, if tithe money can be allocated to buy them. It should be easier for men to tithe in an expanding economy, because the additional income is used to purchase goods and services that are ever-lower on men's scale of values. But their scale of values changes as their income rises. They find it more difficult to tithe. They also find it more difficult to save. Present-orientation increases. The rate of capital formation decreases. The rate of economic growth therefore decreases.

E. Breaking the Addiction

What is promised here is that God's people will be supplied with all that they need to promote the work of God's kingdom. Jesus did not say that they will receive all that they want. Mammon's kingdom makes that promise, and then reneges by raising men's wants ever higher: "The more you get, the more you want." This addiction threatens men's work in the kingdom. The tithe is God's primary counter-measure to mammon's addiction.

What is primary is the kingdom of God: searching for it and, having found it, working to extend it. There is no guarantee implied in this passage that good men will receive all that they want. In fact, they may lose much of what they have. If they are addicted to more, they must break the habit. If they refuse, then they will move into the kingdom of mammon. As God's kingdom expands and produces more wealth, covenant-keepers must be ever-more alert to this addiction. If they succumb to it, God will either take the kingdom away from them or else impose a setback that will break the addiction. This is the message of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

When hard times arrive, men's tastes change. When they are hungry, they do not worry about the latest fashions. When they face eviction from their homes, they do not worry about new carpeting. They hunker down. They do not buy new items just because they are new. They make do with what they own. They grow more appreciative about what they still have when they have lost much of what they had.[12] Or they may lose hope. If they had worshipped too long at

12. *We Had Everything But Money* (Greendale, Wisconsin: Country Books, 1992). This is a book of reminiscences about the Great Depression of the 1930s in the United States.

mammon's shrine, they are more likely to lose hope. The worst of the addicts may even become cannibals:

> And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee: So that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of his children which he shall leave: So that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat: because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates (Deut. 28:53–57).

F. Anti-Procrastination

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (v. 34). This sounds as though Jesus was promoting a radical present-orientation. This was not the case. What he was warning against was worry. The evils of tomorrow are too many to worry about effectively. Concern yourself with today's immediate problems.

Does this mean that we are not to think about the possible negative effects tomorrow of what we do today? No, but it does mean that we must be aware of the reality of time. *We are responsible today for what we do today*. We are not omniscient. We cannot see equally clearly what will happen tomorrow. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Cor. 13:12). The further we peer into the future, the less we can forecast accurately. So, we are not to worry about all the bad things that might happen. We should deal with today's evils. These are the evils that we must do something about.

But this still does not answer the question: Are we not to think about the possible effects of today on tomorrow? Are we to focus only on today? How can we make plans? A military commander who does not think about tomorrow will not prepare today for tomorrow. What we do today depends heavily on what we think will happen tomor-

row. This is especially true of upper-class people, who are future-oriented. Is the New Testament present-oriented? No.

What is here forbidden are worry and anxiety. The same Greek word translated as *thought* in this verse is translated elsewhere translated as *careful*. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6–7). It means *full of care*, not *cautious*.

Worrying about the future is counter-productive. It paralyzes people. Worrying about the near future is short-lived. Jesus said to deal with today's worries today, and stop worrying about tomorrow. He was warning against procrastination. Sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof. Concentrate your concern on today's problems. Tomorrow's may not arrive.

We have only limited resources, including emotional resources. We must allocate them carefully., i.e., cautiously. We must not waste them. Work on today's problems today. Identify tomorrow's problems only for the purpose of dealing with their preliminary aspects today. If they cannot be dealt with today, ignore them. Focus on what you can do something about. Then get a good night's sleep. You have done all you can. God does not you accountable for doing more than you can.

Conclusion

The first things we are to seek are God's kingdom and His righteousness. The thing we need in order to find the kingdom is trust in God rather than in ourselves. Then, after we are in the kingdom, we will receive whatever we need to continue our work. "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (Matt. 6:25).[13] "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (Matt. 6:31).

The top priority here is exercising faith and seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This may even involve giving up the wealth that enables us to deal with lower priorities. That was the case with the rich young ruler. He had too many other, higher priorities.

13. Chapter 14.

Had he already found the kingdom, he might have put his wealth to better uses than before, but Jesus knew that his wealth was what was keeping him from the search. Because covenant-keepers are supposed to know that their kingdom work is important to God and will be funded, they can stop worrying about the future. Because they are extremely future-oriented—heaven and eternity—they are not supposed to worry about the near-term future, i.e., tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Instead, they are to do all they can today in dealing with those problems that can be dealt with today.

16

THE GOLDEN RULE AND GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

> *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*
>
> MATTHEW 7:7–12

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the heavenly Father who gives whatever His children ask: sanctions, which is point four of the biblical covenant.[1] On this principle rests what has come to be called the golden rule: "Do unto others what you would have others to do unto you." This phrase never actually appears in this form in the Bible. It says, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." And it adds, "for this is the law and the prophets."

A. A Program of Cost-Effective Seeking

This passage includes one of the greatest promises in the Bible: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." It is comparable to this promise: "If ye have

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20b). What are we to make of all this?

1. The Faith to Seek

First, seeking is the outworking of faith. We have already seen that *faith is a means of risk-reduction*.[2] But this passage goes further: *active seeking is a means of wealth accumulation*. The good things of life are available for the seeking—not just for the asking, but the seeking. *Seeking* is a program that combines faith, identification of the items desired, planning to gain these items, and a unique means of securing the completion of the plan. This final stage is generally referred to as the golden rule. All elements must be present for the program to work as outlined here.

The first step listed here is asking, but it is not the first step in the seeking process. The seeker must already have identified whatever it is that he wants. This takes great spiritual maturity. This is the most difficult aspect of the entire procedure. He must identify his own scale of values. Put another way, he must identify his priorities and the reasons for them. He must seek conformity of his priorities to God's written revelation. The Gospel of Matthew makes it plain that the supreme priority is the kingdom of God. This is the covenant-keeper's method of fulfilling the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).[3]

The second step is the planning stage: "seeking." Once he knows what it is he is after, he must think about how he can attain this goal. He must develop a plan of action. He must get from here to there. I have argued elsewhere that this plan consists of two parts, once the goal is identified: (1) estimating the price; (2) estimating the time frame. The shorter the time frame, the more it will cost to complete the plan. We do not get something—above all, time—for nothing.

The third step—knocking—is Jesus' way to describe prayer. His definition underlies another passage on prayer, the parable of the woman and the unjust judge. "…There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within

2. Chapter 15.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith" (Luke 18:2–6). This is the model for persevering prayer. We are to pray to God as if He were an unjust judge.[4]

We see this in another passage on prayer—indeed, *the* passage on prayer. Immediately after presenting what we call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus presented an analogy. As we shall see, this passage includes the same words as this chapter's text.

> And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:5–13)[5]

2. Repetition

He who prays must be stubborn. If a prayer is worth praying, it is worth praying again. But what if God's answer is a clear-cut "no"? Then we should stop praying. Paul wrote: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong"

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

5. *Ibid*., ch. 22.

(II Cor. 12:7–10). Paul had to learn to live with his thorn in the flesh. But most men cannot be sure that a prayer will not be answered until death removes the opportunity—either the death of the person who prays or the one being prayed for.

The frustration of unanswered prayer is always a threat to the faith of the godly person who prays in faith. *Unwavering faith is basic to getting prayers answered*. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:5–8). It takes courage to pray this way: *the courage to expect God to answer the prayer*. Unanswered prayer is a temptation to disbelieve the promise and therefore the One who made the promise.

Moses told Joshua to exercise courage. "And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed" (Deut. 31:7–8).[6] The same kind of courage must underlie successful prayer. This degree of courage is not given to every Christian, or even most Christians, in most periods of history.

B. Good Things for the Asking

"How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" The child asks for bread. The father does not give him a stone. The child asks for fish. The father does not give him a scorpion. The first request is minimal: bread. The second is for something extra: fish. Giving a stone is an evil response to a child's request for bread. Giving a scorpion for the request for fish would be even worse. What was Jesus' point? That men, being evil, do good things to those whom they love. How much more does God do good things for those whom He loves.

But what if the child had asked for a stone to cast at an enemy? Would a wise father grant him his request? No. How much more would a wise father not grant a child's request for a scorpion? Of

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 74.

what good use is a scorpion to a child? What Jesus maintained here was that a legitimate request from a child should be answered by his father. So is God's open hand in relation to His children.

What seems legitimate in our eyes may be the equivalent of a scorpion in our lives: a deadly gift. We lack insight into our own hearts. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:9–10). We are not always good judges of character, especially our own.

The father's gift to a child in response to a legitimate request should be our model for understanding God's responses to our prayers. If we do not get our prayers answered, then the fault may be in our assessment of our needs or perhaps our assessment of the times. The father gives his son bread, but not every time the son may ask throughout the day. Similarly, God gives us what we need when we need it. What defines our need? God's calling and timing. We must see our needs in terms of God's kingdom. The theme of God's kingdom is found throughout Matthew. The kingdom is central; we are not.

Job asked God for death. "Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off! Then should I yet have comfort; yea, I would harden myself in sorrow: let him not spare; for I have not concealed the words of the Holy One. What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?" (Job 6:8–11). God had other plans for Job: blessing (Job. 42). He did not grant this request.

What is good for man? Whatever is good for God. *The criterion of good is theocentric*. Through the power of prayer, men are enabled to participate in the extension of God's kingdom. They see their prayers come to pass in history. But these answered prayers extend God's kingdom in history. Prayers are answered in history; the kingdom is extended through answered prayers in history.

C. What We Do Unto Others

The passage ends with the reminder that when we make requests to God, we should heed requests by men. Doing unto others what we would have others do unto us is, above all, a description of our relation to God. We are His agents. We represent God to others. They see us. When He tells us to do to others what we would have them do

to us, He is calling us to exercise justice. This is not a law for the governing of relationships among drug addicts, for example. We must judge what is good for us in terms of God's kingdom. Then we are to extend grace to others in terms of God's kingdom. This is what we expect from others, beginning with God. We go to Him to plead our cases. Others come to us to do the same. We expect God to grant us our requests. Others expect us to do the same. The fundamental issue here is justice tempered with mercy.

We do good unto others. We thereby represent God to them. We want good done to us by others. We must therefore serve as good models for them, as God's covenantal representatives. We must treat others well; otherwise, we should not expect them to treat us well. When we treat others well, God honors this by granting us our legitimate requests. This, too, is a testimony to others. They see our prayers being answered, and they learn something about covenantal cause and effect in history. But if we treat others poorly, then we testify falsely to them about God. We hinder the extension of His kingdom. We risk having our prayers go unanswered. This, too, testifies to covenantal cause and effect in history.

We should give good gifts to our enemies. "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:42–44).[7] We wear them down with kindness. We show them God's love in history. This either is a means of grace or a means of cursing. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20).

Doing good to others means that others will learn to trust us. Our positive, predictable behavior lowers their risk of dealing with us. A basic law of economics is this: when prices fall, more is demanded. In this case, we are talking about more opportunities for mutual exchange. When we take advantage of these opportunities by not taking advantage of people, this increases our wealth.

God will not grant every frivolous request that catches our fancy. Neither are we to grant requests to everyone who asks us for something frivolous. The key issue is how our requests of God, like their requests of us, fit into God's overall kingdom work.

7. Chapter 10.

Conclusion

There are priorities for prayer. They must reflect a reconstructed scale of values: kingdom first. Men are to ask in faith, praying diligently for good things. These good things are good from the kingdom's point of view, and therefore from covenant-keeping man's point of view. The kingdom of God is the top priority. Our prayers are to enable us to fit our plans into God's plans for the kingdom. Answered prayers enable us to see God's plans coming to fruition. So do unanswered prayers. The positive sanctions and the negative sanctions are to train us in the discipline of kingdom-building.

Prayer is a discipline that takes a lifetime to develop. Men call upon God, and in His own good time, He answers prayers that extend His kingdom. To the extent that men prayer kingdom-building prayers, they will see their prayers answered. The secret of getting one's prayers answered is to conform oneself to God and be alert to one's role in this kingdom. We must become like the children of Issachar. "And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment" (I Chron. 12:32).

Treating others as well as we expect to be treated increases the likelihood that others will want to cooperate with us. We become lower-risk trading partners. We will be presented with more opportunities to extend our range of choices—our wealth—because others know that they will be treated fairly in ventures with us.

17

THE TWO GATES

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

MATTHEW 7:13–14

The theocentric focus of this law is God as the gatekeeper. He built the gate to eternal life. He established its boundaries, i.e., the pathway's ethical boundaries. This is point three of the biblical covenant.[1] God told Joshua: "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:7–8).

A. Choose Life

Every man has a choice before him: life or death. Moses warned Israel at the end of his life:

> See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and **to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judg-**

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

> **ments**, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore **choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:15–20).[2]

The basis of life is clearly stated: "To love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments." But no man can keep the law perfectly. So, the law testifies that every man needs grace. But this grace is not cheap grace. It is granted by God on only one judicial basis: Jesus Christ's perfect fulfilling of the law, with God's curse placed on Him nonetheless (Gal. 3:13).

The gate to life is narrow. Does this mean that the way is too difficult for most people? Or does it mean that the way is hidden from most people? If the way is too difficult for most people, then this must mean that it is not too difficult for some people. This means that the way to life is the way of the law, of good works. Paul preached the contrary view in the synagogue at Antioch: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38–39).

If, on the other hand, the narrow gate is hidden to most people, then some do get through the gate on the basis of their having found it. Evidence for this interpretation is found in Jesus' discussion of His ministry. He did not come to show the truth to everyone. He showed in only to a few. "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25).

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2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 73.

> And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Matt. 13:10–17).[3]

This was a fulfillment of Isaiah: "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isa. 6:9–10). This *selective revelation* is God the Father's work. "He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:15–17).

These passages prove that the narrow gate is not closed to most people on the basis of their sin. It is closed to *all* people on the basis of their sin. Then how can it be open to anyone? Only on the basis of Christ's perfection, which is imputed to them by God. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through

3. Chapter 27.

faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:20–26). "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom. 4:5–8).

B. Many Called, Few Chosen

Narrow is the way, Jesus said. The question is: Is it closed to most men forever? Or was Jesus speaking only of His own era, the waning days of Old Covenant Israel?

1. Harvest of Souls

His words indicate that He was speaking of conditions in His own era, not necessarily about the future. More than this: things would soon change. That which Jesus had taught to His followers would soon be heard by many people. Did this mean many men in general or many Jews? The context indicates: many Jews. "In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke 12:1–3). He told the disciples: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together" (John 4:35–36). "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disci-

ples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:35–38).

2. The Wedding Feast

Christ's parable of the king's wedding feast for his son seems to indicate that on the final day, there will be more people left outside the feast than the number of those inside. "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:11–14).

This passage is one of those commonly used against postmillennialism. Critics ask: How can postmillennialists believe in a great outpouring of faith? After all, many are called, but few are chosen. But the critics neglect the context of this parable. This is the parable of the wedding feast. The king is God; His Son is Jesus Christ. *Jesus presented this parable in the context of opposition from the Pharisees*. "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet. And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come" (Matt. 21:45–22:3). It was clear to the Pharisees that they were the targets of this parable, for immediately after He gave it, "Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk" (Matt. 22:15).

The prophetic context of this passage was Jesus' warning to the Pharisees: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). This was a warning that the way of life was about to be opened to the gentiles. More than this: the way of life would soon be closed to Israel on any basis other than membership in the universal church. This meant that Jews would be outnumbered by gentiles. Jews would not gain access to the kingdom of God based on their Jewishness: their claim of descent from the patriarchs, their

adherence to what later were called Talmudic traditions, or any other exclusively Jewish possession.

The parable of the wedding feast is about socially accptable people, who demanded entrance on their own terms, dressed in their own garments, in relation to the undesirables, who were content to allow the king to clothe them. The parable says that the best people initially slew the agents of the king (Matt. 22:6). This was a clear reference to the practice of the Jews: slaying the prophets in the past and slaying Christ's disciples in the near future. The king was fed up with this rejection. He then opened the feast to the least desirable elements. "Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests" (Matt. 22:8–10). On the highways of Israel were gentiles, as the parable of the Good Samaritan indicates. The servants invited both Jews (good) and gentiles (bad) without distinction. The wedding feast was now open to anyone brought in by the servants. But it was not open to those who came on their own, dressed in their own garments. The Pharisees knew exactly what Jesus was saying. They immediately took counsel against Him.

"Many are called, but few are chosen." *This referred to the Jews of Jesus' day*. The narrow confines of the Old Covenant were about to be shattered by the New Covenant. The Jews would not accept this. They would not accept entrance into the kingdom of Christ on these terms: open entry by the gentiles without their circumcision.

3. Jews vs. Gentiles

This is even clearer in a similar account in Luke. The contrast is between those who claim to be the descendants of Abraham and the patriarchs vs. those who arrive from all directions: gentiles. The former will not gain access to eternal life, and the latter will.

> And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin

> to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last (Luke 13:22–30).[4]

Immediately following the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the faithful centurion: "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:11–12). The same imagery appears: gentiles coming from afar, sitting in the presence of the patriarchs, with Jews outside, under the curse, gnashing their teeth.

The Pharisees were greatly offended. That is because they fully understood what Jesus was saying about them and their nation. They wanted Him to stop preaching such things. They wanted Him to leave town. "The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee" (Luke 13:31). What the Pharisees clearly understood has not been understood by Christian expositors, who interpret Christ's words apart from their context: the imminent transfer of the kingdom of God from Old Covenant Israel to the New Covenant church.

Many were called: many Jews in His day. Few were chosen. The contrast in these passages is not between the number of lost people in history vs. the number saved. It is between the number of Jews saved in Jesus' day vs. the number of Jews not saved. He was saying that the Jews of His day were not God's chosen people. They were the "called but rarely chosen" people.

C. Heeding the Call

The call is for repentance and acceptance of a judicial substitute before God. The call is not for the listener's works righteousness, but for *Jesus Christ's works righteousness*. "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:23–24).

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4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 32.

Jesus called men to obedience. He did not say that the path is too difficult for most men. On the contrary, He said it is easier than what men in sin must face. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28–30).[5] To interpret the metaphor of the narrow gate as if it were a call to ascetic moral discipline is to miss the point entirely. That was what the Jews thought the gate was: fenced in with innumerable laws that only Jews and a few of their proselytes could obey.

The broad gate that leads to destruction is not merely the path of easy virtue; it is equally the path of ascetic self-discipline. All robes but the wedding garments provided by the king are unacceptable, Jesus warned. All righteousness other than Christ's imputed perfection is substandard. The Jews wanted to work their way through the narrow gate. The gentiles wanted much the same, if not ethically, then at least ritually. Hardened sinners wanted to avoid thinking of such matters. But all were headed toward the broad gate that leads to destruction. What they all needed was what men in every era need: a judicial substitute that is acceptable to God. *They needed an acceptable sacrifice*. "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:10–14).

Jesus is the acceptable sacrifice. He offered Himself, once. Then He "sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." This footstool metaphor is found throughout the Bible. Psalm 110 is the premier passage. The author of Hebrews used the metaphor a second time. "But to which of the angels said he at any times, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" (Heb. 1:13). Jesus will remain seated at God's right hand until all of His enemies are conquered, for they are His footstool. The text is clear about this. He will not return to earth to reign on a throne in Jerusalem or anywhere else. The last enemy is death. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

5. Chapter 25.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:25–26).[6] When death is conquered, Jesus will return to judge the world. The two events are the same event: resurrection to eternal life and resurrection to the second death (Rev. 20:11–15). At that time, it will be visible to all just which of the two gates each man passed through on his journey from history to eternity.

Conclusion

Man's top priority in this passage is to walk through the narrow gate. This gate is not narrow in the sense of being difficult to pass through. It is narrow in the sense of being inaccessible except through God's special grace. Otherwise, it is a closed gate. The gate leading to destruction is wide open. Anyone can pass through: the ascetic, the hedonist, the ritualist, the libertine. Lawyers are especially welcome. "And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers" (Luke 11:46).

6. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 16.

18

BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM

> *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*
>
> MATTHEW 7:15–20

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as the owner of the orchard, who cuts down any tree that does not bear good fruit. As the creator, He has standards of productivity. He evaluates men's output in this life. Their output in history indicates what their output will be in eternity. Some He will spare, and some He will burn. This relates to sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. To Judge a Prophet

This passage is important for laying down a principle of judgment: what a man does in history testifies to his eternal condition. What he says may be judged by what he does and what his followers do.

1. The False Prophet

The context of these remarks is the false prophet. The false prophet may sound plausible initially. The listener may have trouble determining whether the prophet's message is true or false. Jesus said

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

to watch carefully for the results of the prophet's ministry. There is continuity between what a man says and what the results are.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the prophet possessed lawful authority over both priests and magistrates. He had special revelation from God. The judicial marks of his prophetic office were two-fold: His call to worship the God of Israel and the fulfillment of his predictions.

> If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee (Deut. 13:1–5).

> But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:20–22).

The Old Covenant was still in force in Jesus' day. Prophets still existed. John the Baptist was a prophet (Luke 7:28). He condemned religious leaders in harsh terms, calling them vipers (Matt. 3:7). He condemned a king, although this cost him his life. It was not easy for men to know for certain whether they were hearing a true prophet or a false one. If his words sounded plausible, what else could men use to judge the legitimacy of his office? Jesus said: by the fruits of this office. The ministry of a true prophet will be productive of righteousness. The ministry of a false prophet will not.

2. Hierarchical Responsibility

This means that the actions of a man's followers will testify to the legitimacy of his claim. He is responsible for their actions. He is their

representative, their spokesman. He cannot disassociate himself from them. If he will not impose negative sanctions against them, then he must be assumed to be in agreement with them. By their fruits we will know him.

Gamaliel understood this principle in discussing the ministry of the apostles. "Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply [it happen] ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:34–39). The ministries of previous prophets had come to nothing. The religious authorities should wait and see, he advised. They took his advice.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, prophetic ministries bore their respective fruit rapidly. There was time to wait and see. Korah and Dathan rebelled against Moses, but their rebellion did not last long. Negative sanctions came rapidly.

> And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD. And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation (Num. 16:28–33).

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the judgments of God in history were down payments on His judgments in eternity. Men could make accu-

rate judgments on the basis of God's visible judgments. But would they? Or would they take their stand with the false prophets and the kings who hired them? Time after time, the Israelites sided with the false prophets. They did not rebel when their leaders imprisoned and killed the true prophets. For this, they eventually paid the price: captivity. Their sin had gone on for generations. As had been true of the Egyptians and Amalekites before them, the multi-generational bills eventually came due.

Evil men had rebelled against good fruit. That was their great sin. Jesus repeated this accusation: the forefathers had persecuted the prophets. They had brought negative sanctions against the true prophets. This accusation had judicial merit because of the visible relationship between a prophet's words and their outcome. Covenant-keepers would have recognized the difference. That Israel had not recognized the difference, generation after generation, had condemned the nation. The fact that still they had not changed would soon condemn the nation forever. Jesus, as the final prophet, brought His covenant lawsuit against them in the name of the former prophets.

> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Matt. 23:27–36).

B. Christ's Three Covenantal Offices

The New Covenant has none of the Mosaic Covenant's offices: prophet, priest, or king. There is no covenantal prophet today. No one is granted the authority to speak God's word authoritatively, commanding civil

and religious leaders to do what he says on pain of God's immediate sanctions.[2] No one's voice of authority exceeds the Bible's. There is no covenantal priest today, mediating sacrifices between God and man. There is no covenantal king, anointed by a priest or a prophet in God's name. Jesus alone retains the three-fold title. He referred to Himself as a prophet: "Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33). Hebrews calls Him high priest: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3:1). Revelation calls him king of kings. "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16). These offices have ceased; Christ holds them as monopolies.

This has changed the application of Jesus' law governing false prophecy. The office of true prophet has been annulled in history. One mark of the true prophet was his ability to invoke immediate sanctions. "And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight" (II Kings 1:10–13). This time constraint no longer operates in the New Covenant. God's historical sanctions are predictable, but only in the broad sense: if men continue in their sins, then they will suffer corporate judgment. As to when, we do not know.

C. Ethical Cause and Effect

The delay of sanctions makes it more difficult to judge correctly about the quality of a movement's fruits. The question is: Does this cause-and-effect relationship still exist? Some, if not most, theologians assume

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch.43:D.

that such predictable historical sanctions no longer exist. They agree with Meredith G. Kline, who writes that ethical cause and effect in history are, humanly speaking, essentially random. Kline is speaking of what he called the common grace order, which is not a familiar concept to most Christians, but they would agree with his view of historical sanctions (except when their nation is at war). "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways." But if this is correct, then we are faced with an enormous burden: judging a movement by its fruits. If there is no cause and effect relationship between bad theology and bad ethics, or bad ideology and the visible outcome, then making accurate judgments becomes far more difficult than it was under the Mosaic Covenant. It is difficult enough already: longer time frames for roots to produce visible fruits. But if there is no predictable relationship whatsoever, then we must judge strictly on theological content—a task that few Christians are well-equipped to perform.

What of fruits other than prosperity? "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:19–24). Here we can surely make judgments. These are individual fruits.

What are the economic effects of these rival lists of fruits? Does evil consistently produce wealth? Does righteousness consistently produce poverty? Or are the outcomes random, as Kline says? If they are random, then no expressly biblical economic theory is possible. If the outcomes are perverse, then we must search for institutional means of converting evil personal motives into positive effects. This is what most versions of free market theory have sought to do, from Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714) until the present.[3]

3. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

> The profit motive, when coupled with private ownership, produces incentives for serving others. Men's greed becomes their motivation to meet the demands of other men. Free market economic theory has this great advantage over socialist theory: it recognizes original sin. It does not assume, as socialism assumes, that concentrated political power—legalized force—makes those who wield it either wiser or kinder. On the contrary, free market theory assumes the opposite: power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.[4]

Economists are self-consciously agnostic with regard to God. They never mention God, except as a belief that produces predictable responses. If we accept either the covenantal randomness of corporate effects of common confessions, or the covenantal perversity of individual results, we cannot construct biblical economic theory. We must then appeal to this or that humanistic theory. But if righteous roots produce positive fruits in history, and unrighteous roots produce undesirable fruits, then biblical social theory becomes possible.

D. Individual and Corporate Fruitfulness

The passage refers to false prophets: individuals. Yet in another context, the parable of the fig tree, Jesus was referring to Old Covenant Israel (Luke 13:6–9). So, the concept of fruit as a manifestation of spiritual roots applies to both individuals and corporate entities.

Applying this principle to societies, we conclude that there are standards of productivity that we can apply to assess the rightness or wrongness of that society. There also has to be human discernment of these standards and their proper application in history. "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." This statement is an extension to individuals of the corporate principles of Leviticus 26[5] and Deuteronomy 28.[6] The theologian who argues that Jesus substituted individual predictability for corporate predictability has to assume

4. Lord Acton, letter to Bishop Creighton (April 5, 1887). *Selected Writings of Lord Acton, vol. II, Essays in the Study and Writing of History* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty-Classics, 1986), p. 383. Acton's aphorism is immediately followed by another aphorism, also famous: "Great men are almost always bad men. . . ." The context was an attack on the medieval Inquisition, the responsibility for which Creighton had shifted away from the Papacy: *History of the Papacy during the Period of the Reformation*, vols. 3, 4 (1887), which Acton had reviewed.

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 33–35.

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, chaps. 69, 70.

that the covenant's continuity applies only to individuals. But then what of families? What of churches? Does this principle apply only to individuals? Doesn't it also apply to movements based on the teachings of individuals?

Pietism denies this principle's applicability to the world outside a Trinitarian covenant, and then seeks to deny the legitimacy of this covenant to civil government. Christian self-government under biblical law, yes. Christian family government under biblical law, yes. Christian church government under biblical law, yes. But not Christian civil government. "There can be no such thing as Christian civil government. What existed in Mosaic Israel before the captivity has been annulled in principle." A problem with pietism is that it openly surrenders to covenant-breakers the authority to establish their civil covenant over covenant keepers. Somehow, we are expected to believe that a Christian civil covenant will not produce the positive fruit that a non-Christian civil covenant will produce. For the pietist, the realm of the civil covenant is governed by a reverse covenantal system of sanctions: biblical law produces tyranny, while "neutral" civil law produces good.[7]

Jesus' words here create an enormous exegetical problem for pietism, one which the pietists for over three centuries have dealt with by ignoring it. Jesus' words, if they were ever dealt with exegetically by pietistic social theorists, would force them to declare the existence of a realm of government in which a false confession produces good fruit, and where a true confession—faith in the Trinity—produces bad fruit. What is not true for the other three oath-bound covenants—individual, ecclesiastical, and familistic—is somehow true for the civil covenant. This was surely not taught by the Old Covenant. The opposite was taught. It is not formally taught by the New Covenant. A covenantal system of cause and effect applies to individuals and to their movements, such as Phariseeism, Jesus taught. What He taught was consistent with the Mosaic system of corporate sanctions. But the pietist claims to have discovered a principle in natural law theory or democratic theory which supersedes both the Mosaic law and Jesus' teaching on roots and fruits. This principle, discovered in the mid-seventeenth century by Rhode Island's Roger Williams, and elaborated in the eighteenth century by deists and atheists, teaches the reverse

7. Except, dispensationalists say, in the State of Israel. There, we are told, the state may lawfully and profitably impose Talmudic law, which sometimes is applied Mosaic law, on recalcitrant Arabs and Christians, as well as on recalcitrant secular Jews.

of what Jesus taught here, yet it has to be true, pietists assure us. It has to be true because modern democratic theory teaches it. To oppose it would be theocratic, and we all know how bad theocracy is, meaning Trinitarian theocracy. A humanistic theocracy—the reign of democratic man—is supposedly what we need. This is supposedly what God wants. Why, we are not told.

E. Free Market Theory

If Jesus' words are true, then modern free market theory labors under an enormous burden: Mandeville's curse. Free market economic theory promotes a view of society that says that supernatural ethics is irrelevant. Evil men, if they live under a private property system, will produce good things. Compared to what evil men produce under socialism, this statement has been proven true in both theory and practice, i.e., fruits and roots. But the ultimate test of free market theory is not its success over socialism. It is its success over God's corporate sanctions in history.

The free market is not autonomous, for man is not autonomous. The free market can produce, and has produced, wealth untold for hundreds of millions of people. But it has also placed urban men in great peril. The division of labor has been extended to such a degree that men are cut off from the soil. They cannot feed themselves. They live in highly interdependent environments that can sustain life only through extensive exchange—an exchange system that rests on fractional reserve banking and computerization. Everything that sustains life for most urban people is in some way dependent on public utility systems, banks, trains, and traffic control systems, which are operated by or regulated by the civil government.

This is only one example of the risks facing modern man. Modern biological warfare is another. So is the proliferation of small-scale nuclear weapons. Our cities are vulnerable. The free market has made possible the creation of vast interdependent production systems that have sustained a huge growth of population. The free market has done this irrespective of men's confessions of faith. This professedly neutral system of universal blessings has allowed the evolution of a society that is vulnerable to any number of universal curses. Yet men do not repent. They do not see how vulnerable they are. They do not see the looming sanctions of God. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee

power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God" (Deut. 8:17–20).[8]

We speak of the market as an impersonal mechanism. We think of mechanisms as tools. Then we insist that tools are neutral. By this, we mean that they can be used for good or evil. But tools are not morally neutral. Nothing is morally neutral. Tools are the products of social systems, and social systems are not morally neutral. Tools extend the systems that furthered their production. Tools make us dependent on these systems. If we rely on our tools, we thereby rely on the social system that created them. But what if that social system is founded on a false oath? Has it not become the corporate equivalent of a false prophet? Was it not built in terms of false prophecies, such as the promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, to quote a well-known document written mainly by a well-known unitarian?

Common grace is a great blessing, but it cannot be maintained apart from special grace.[9] A society built on some version of common grace theology—the common confession of man—rests on a fragile foundation. If God withdraws His special grace, leaving only the economic fruits of abandoned confessional roots, the tree will eventually cease bearing fruit. Surely Europe is now in such a spiritual condition. Asia has never even had the roots. Asians imported the free market and its computers in the hope of escaping poverty. For a while, Asia did begin to escape poverty. But the Asians are trapped by their tools, copied from the West and mass produced, and also by the international banking system.

Social systems are package deals because they are based on worldviews. Worldviews are package deals.[10] The dependence of free market ideas and practices on a specifically Western, biblical-covenantal view of the world, the free market economist is loathe to admit. Such an admission undercuts his claims of *autonomy and universality*: of economics as a science, of capitalism as a social system, and of man

8. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

9. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6.

10. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetics: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1998), pp. 102–103.

as a product of impersonal evolution. I am not saying that demand curves do not slope downward and to the right in Asia, as they do in the West. I *am* saying that there is no such thing as a demand curve outside of the economist's conceptual toolkit. Demand curves are abstractions based on assumptions that can never be true in the real world, and which are then taught as truths to gullible undergraduates by far more gullible professors.[11] I am not saying that people do not respond predictably to incentives. I *am* saying that humanistic capitalism's incentives are being sold to millions of people at low prices that do not reflect the true risk of subsequent transactions. Godless capitalism is being sold almost as an addictive drug is sold. "There's no risk. Try it. You'll like it." No doubt they will. They will also become addicted to the division of labor that comes with it—a division of labor based on a confession: "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth."

Conclusion

There is a predictable connection between confession and visible results, between invisible roots and visible fruits. This connection takes longer to manifest itself in the New Covenant, for prophetic sanctions have been transferred to Christ. Jesus warned His followers to examine the fruits when they are not sure of the roots. While the introductory verses indicate that He was discussing the office of prophet, the general principle is universal: a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

The priority here is developing wise judgment. Wise judgment begins with a confession of faith in the God of the Bible. It matures through a careful study of God's law (Ps. 119) and obedience, i.e., applying the written law to our decisions. As we develop wise judgment, we can better assess the claims of those who come to us in God's name, as Old Covenant prophets used to come. We can hear their confessions and see the results of these confessions. On the basis of what we see, we can assess the truth of what we hear.

11. These impossible assumptions include: (1) men respond to price changes that are infinitesimal, i.e., unobservable; (2) a curve exists at one instant in time, yet men's decisions are made over time; (3) other things remain equal in a world in which we cannot change just one thing; (4) men's tastes do not change when prices change. There are no doubt lots of others, but my expected cost of recalling them is higher than my expected gain.

19

FIRST THINGS FIRST

And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

MATTHEW 8:19–22

The theocentric principle here is that God expects permanent commitment: hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.[1] There is a hierarchy of values.

A. The Uprooted

In these two incidents, Jesus was approached by men who said they wanted to follow Him. He did not send the first man away. Rather, He gave him a reason not to commit. The second man was willing to commit, but only after burying his father. Jesus warned this man to ignore his dead father's funeral. These seem to be opposite cases. The first man wanted to come; Jesus discouraged him. The second wanted to bury his father first; Jesus discouraged him. In both cases, Jesus was motivated by the same principle: first things first. This is the principle of priorities. It is the governing principle of the Gospel of Matthew: priorities within the kingdom of God.

The scribe wanted to follow Jesus. This was surely not a normal request. Scribes constantly confronted Jesus publicly, trying to un-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

dermine His authority through questioning. Perhaps this man was serious; perhaps he was an informer. In either case, Jesus challenged him to pay a high price. Jesus had no home, no place to call home, no permanent pillow. He was in a condition like Jacob's in his flight from Esau. "And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep" (Gen. 28:11). Jacob had become a wanderer, a man without a home.

This is not a normal condition. Wandering is usually a curse. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness; this was surely a curse on the exodus generation. They wanted to rest. They wanted a place to rest. They did not receive their wish. One of the basic ideas of rest is to have a place of one's own to call home. A place of rest serves as headquarters for our dominion. We work; then we return home to rest. The Promised Land was Israel's place of rest.

Jesus' ministry required that He wander. Those who followed Him also wandered. They gave up their places of rest. They also gave up predictable sources of income. Their seemingly patternless wandering broke their familiar pattern of work outside the home, return to home, and rest. Wandering had also broken the exodus generation's prior pattern of limited dominion: servitude in Egypt.

In the wilderness, the Israelites had been sustained by the manna. We are not told how Jesus and His disciples were sustained. It may have been charity. Perhaps they took odd jobs. Somehow, they had money. Judas kept the bag (John 12:6). But the scribe, hearing that Jesus had no place of rest, must have understood that he also would have to forfeit more than a place of rest. He would forfeit the normal pattern of dominion. He could no longer rely on a steady stream of income.

Jesus was telling the scribe that he faced risk. How would he deal with this risk? By relying on others? By relying on Jesus' persuasion of others? By relying on odd jobs, or money shared by the other disciples who might find odd jobs? The pattern of dominion was broken by Jesus' way of life. He refused to stay in His own region, where He was not taken seriously. "And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these

things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matt. 13:54–58). Familiarity had bred contempt. So, He walked unfamiliar pathways to do His work.

Jesus was nearing the end of His time on earth. He was at the beginning of the next stage of His ministry: covenantal representation by His church. To prepare His followers, He first broke the patterns of their lives. He reshaped their lives by reshaping their dominion patterns. He took away their pillows. He substituted rocks instead.

God did the same with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He took away their places of rest. He uprooted them. He drove Jacob and his sons into Egypt. He drove Moses out of Egypt, and then out of his home in Midian. He did it to David in his time with the Philistines (I Sam. 27:7) and during Absalom's rebellion (II Sam. 16). He did it to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). He did it to Paul. The uprooting process is part of the next phase of the expansion of the kingdom.

Jesus' parents were uprooted when they took Him into Egypt (Matt. 2:14). His public ministry began with His uprooting out of Galilee. The familiar environment that had sustained Him was removed. His hope for rest could not be placed in geography. It had to come from above. God the Father would sustain Him. Jesus would do His work of building the kingdom without the capital asset that most men rely on: a predictable place of rest.

Missionary activity is always based on an uprooting. Irish monks in the sixth century spread across northern Europe, building monasteries.[2] In the United States, the Baptists and Methodists captured what was then the Western part of the nation by adopting circuit-riding. These men had no permanent homes. John Wesley was the model, who spent most of his adult life on horseback. While ministers in the traditional Calvinistic denominations stayed at home east of the Allegheny Mountains, the Baptists and Methodists worked for little pay and no place of rest in the West. There were 750 Congregational churches in 1780, and about 500 Presbyterian congregations and 450 Baptist congregations. The Methodists were barely visible. By 1900, there were almost 50,000 Baptist congregations, almost 54,000 Methodist congregations, 15,452 Presbyterian, 5,604 Congregational (lib-

2. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of the Roman Empire to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Talese-Doubleday, 1995). This is a popularly written book, not a scholarly history.

eral), 6,264 Episcopal (liberal). There were over 10,298 Disciples congregations: two-thirds of the number of Presbyterians.[3] Episcopalians and Congregationalists were hardly visible in the West.

Jesus was telling the scribe that to follow Him, he would have to become one of the uprooted. He did not tell him he could not join the disciples, but He warned him of the high price.

B. Let the Dead Bury the Dead

The second inquirer was already a disciple, but not one of the permanent wanderers. He was ready to join the wanderers, almost. But first he had to go and bury his father. Jesus dismissed the ritual as trivial. "Let the dead bury the dead." This statement was an epitaph on the grave of Old Covenant Israel.

Filial piety is basic to almost every civilization. It was the heart of classical religion. It was also important in Israel. Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury Abraham (Gen. 25:9). Jacob and Esau buried Isaac (Gen. 35:29). Yet Jesus told the prospective disciple to break with tradition and immediately join the band of wanderers. In a sense, Jesus' inner circle wandered in circles. They were no longer part of the normal pattern of family life in Israel.

The would-be wanderer had to assess the importance of becoming one of the inner circle, being present at the creation of a new world order. Was it worth defying convention? To defy this convention would be to move outside of polite society. He would become an outcast. If he did not bury his father, his son might not bury him. This, in fact, was quite likely. Jesus later warned them: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:34–38).

But it was more than this. The man would have to participate in the burial of Israel. It was not just that his father was dead; it was that his nation was dead. The old order was dead. The new Israel of

3. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 44, Figure 33.

God was being born.[4] This new Israel would not attend the burial of the old Israel. In fact, the new Israel was warned to flee from the old Israel when the signs of the imminent burial appeared (Luke 21:20–22). When Rome's legions arrived, the church was to have departed, which church tradition subsequently said they did, fleeing to the non-Judaic town of Pella.

Conclusion

Jesus warned both men to put first things first: to set their top priority. Joining the wanderers would mean giving up home, bed, and pillow. Jesus had done this; His followers would, too. Was the scribe ready to pay this price? Joining the wanderers would also mean giving up traditions. Burying one's father was a very old tradition in Israel. That tradition was about to go. The new Israel would soon be at war with the old Israel. The household would be divided. The would-be wanderer was told it was time to choose: covenantal life or covenantal death. Jesus told him to choose life.

He was telling them both that the New Covenant would supersede the Old. To join Him would be to take a new covenant oath. They could no longer live halfway between the Old World Order and the New World Order. For a brief time, it might have looked as though that was possible, but it was not. The dead would have to bury the dead. The living would have to wander. Within one generation, they would have to flee. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20–22).

4. The church is called the Israel of God. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). This has always been a problem text for dispensationalists.

20

THE LURE OF BUSINESS

And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.

MATTHEW 8:28–34

The theocentric focus of this passage is God's ability to deliver men from demon possession.[1] God is more powerful than devils. The message of the passage is that men do not want to pay the price of such deliverance.

Jesus delivered the possessed man by exorcising the devils. The devils asked to be allowed to dwell in a nearby herd of swine. As soon as Jesus allowed the demons to enter the swine, the pigs ran into the sea and drowned.

The parallel passage in Mark throws additional light on these events: "And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch.24.

the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (Mark 5:14–17).

One of the two had remained behind with Jesus.[2] "And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel" (Mark 5:18–20).

Why did the demons request to be allowed to reside in the bodies of swine, only to direct their new hosts into a suicidal run into the sea? If the demons needed places to live, why did they destroy their new places of residence?

The demons did not want a place to live in the sense of a dwelling. They wanted a place to live in the sense of a region. They operated in a region in which herds of pigs were kept. This indicates that pork had a local market. The Mosaic dietary laws were not being honored by residents in the region. Was this a region filled with gentiles? The text does not say so, nor does any other text in the New Testament. What it says is that the townspeople were afraid and asked Jesus to leave.

What were they afraid of? Being delivered from demons? This seems unlikely. Demonic possession was a curse to be avoided. The fact that someone locally had been delivered caught their attention. They came out to see for themselves what had happened.

What had happened? Two men had been delivered. One remained behind to testify of his deliverance. But his deliverance had involved the destruction of a herd of swine. This was surely bad for the herd's owner. The swineherders had already told the townspeople the story of the drowned herd. In fact, the passage indicates that the news about the swine preceded the news about the delivered men. As soon as the townspeople received confirmation of the story from the formerly possessed victim, they asked Jesus to leave the region. He complied.

This left the demons behind, without Jesus to bother them until the time of His resurrection and ascension. The demons had asked

2. The accounts in Mark and Luke mention only one man.

Him, "art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" They knew the timetable for their demise.

Why would the townspeople not want to have Jesus living nearby, ready to cast out demons? The answer seems to be His mode of casting them out. He allowed them to enter into a herd of pigs that perished shortly thereafter. Jesus was seen as a kind of polluter. He allowed the overflow—in this case, demons—to destroy private property. The fact that Jews were prohibited from eating pigs and therefore from bidding up their market price made no difference to the townspeople. They were far more fearful about the economic effects of Jesus' action than they were about the threat of demonic possession. They preferred to share their environment with demons, who inhabited men, rather than risk another outbreak of "mad pig disease."

Swine were regarded as an economic asset in that region. If two men could house an entire legion of demons, this seemed a small price to pay for leaving pigs to roam the land and eventually grace the tables of many local residents. That two men would suffer the horrors of possession was, in the eyes of the townspeople, a small price to pay, since the townspeople were not paying it. There was risk of future possession, but they regarded this risk as less of a burden than the threat of the loss of herds of swine.

The demons had recognized the perversity of the local residents. They had planned their spiritual counter-attack well. They would let the townspeople be their spokesmen with Jesus. All it might take was a fast entrance into a herd of swine, and a mad dash down a hill into the water.

Luke added this important information regarding the event. "Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him" (Luke 8:37–40).

Jesus usually instructed those whom He had healed to say nothing publicly. This was a major exception. The personal testimony of the healed man was so convincing that the townspeople subsequently re-

versed their opinion of Jesus and His ministry. But it took personal testimony of a local resident to accomplish this. Their initial reaction was negative.

Conclusion

When men disobey God's law, they find it difficult to keep their priorities in conformity to God's priorities for them. They move from one violation to another. They substitute their priorities for God's. This is why it is important for men to keep the whole of the law. Law-breaking is a slippery slope to destruction (Ps. 73:18;[3] Jer. 23:12).

The men in this region ignored the dietary law against pork. From this seemingly minor infraction came a perverse set of priorities. They valued the preservation of the local swine market more than they valued men's deliverance from spiritual oppression. They feared the risk to pigs more than they feared the risk of demonic forces. For them, men's lives were worth less than pigs' lives.

The townspeople were sensitive to business values. Private property had to be protected. Jesus was threatening business. This was an offense worse than demonic possession. They asked Him to leave. He left. Only the subsequent personal testimony of the healed man persuaded them to reverse their opinion of Jesus.

3. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 17.

21

CALLING VS. OCCUPATION

> *And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.*
>
> MATTHEW 9:9

The theocentric principle here is obedience to God's call. God possesses the lawful authority to call us into His service, point two of the biblical covenant.[1] We are required to heed this call. But to heed the call, we must trust the person who issues it.

A. Publicans

Matthew was a publican: a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated more in the ancient world than they are today. Today's tax collector is the agent of an elected government. This provides a degree of legitimacy to the tax system that Rome did not possess in the eyes of tribute-paying foreigners. The government immediately sold to companies the right to collect taxes. These companies bid for this privilege. The government collected its revenue in advance from the bidders, who in turn sent agents out to collect the taxes from the people. This system is known in retrospect as tax farming.

Tax farming had prevailed under the Roman Republic. Investors in a tax farming company expected to reap more than they sowed. If the group's bid won the privilege of collecting taxes from a particular region, the investors expected to collect more money than they had

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

paid to Rome. Tax farmers were allowed considerable discretion in establishing the amount of taxes owed by any individual. They estimated how much they could collect before they placed their bids.

The Roman government had stood behind these tax farmers. A revolt against the tax man, then as now, was a revolt against civil government authority. But publicans were businessmen. They represented a profit-seeking business as well as the government. Their job was to extract as much money as they could from taxpayers. There was no government tax code. They were not bureaucratic agents of the state. The taxpayers were at a great disadvantage in dealing with them.

Under such a system, tax collectors had an incentive to overcharge taxpayers, and taxpayers had an incentive to lie. Many taxpayers would have known about the nature of the tax farming system. It was to the taxpayers' advantage to pay as little as possible. If tax revenues dropped, the bids at the next tax farming auction might be lower. What was it to them if some profit-seeking Roman monopoly made less profit than its investors had hoped? If Rome collected less as a result, the tributaries would shed no tears.

The tax farming system was abolished under Augustus in Christ's day. He substituted tax collecting by local governments, which then paid the central government. This system was less arbitrary than the tax farming system had been.[2] But there was still a possibility that local tax collectors might overcharge taxpayers, just as their predecessors had done under the tax farming system. John the Baptist recognized this temptation and dealt with it openly: "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (Luke 3:12–13).[3] The tax collector in the Roman world was assumed to be dishonest. John's comment went to the heart of this distrust. But he did not tell them that they were immoral for being tax collectors. He told them only they were immoral if they raised taxes on their own authority and then kept the difference. At every level, he implied, the rule of law should be honored. Tax collectors should know in advance what they are expected to collect. This means that taxpayers should know in advance what they are required to pay. *The*

2. James Macdonald, *A Free Nation Deep in Debt: The Financial Roots of Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), p. 54.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

predictability of law is to apply to taxation. The tax farming system was inherently corrupt because it made possible theft on a massive scale. The system imposed the monopolistic force of law without the rule of law.

B. Occupation

There is a familiar saying in English that is equally true in every other language: "Nothing is certain except death and taxes." Every civil government must collect taxes in some form. Taxpayers prefer to keep more of their wealth than less, so they resist the imposition of taxes. Although they know that some taxation is necessary for their protection, they prefer to have other taxpayers pay. They resent taxes, and they resent tax collectors.

A Jew who served as a tax collector would have been especially resented in Israel. Most of all, a member of the tribe of Levi would have been resented. Levi was the priestly tribe. The parallel accounts say that Matthew was also named Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27).[4]

1. Walking Away

Matthew was sitting at a table, collecting taxes. As soon as he heard Jesus' call, he walked away from his job. But he did more than this, according to Luke's account. He left the money behind. Then he invited in fellow publicans to hear Jesus. In doing so, He gave Jesus another opportunity to confront the religious leaders of the nation. "And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. **And he left all**, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:27–32). Levi left it all behind. Then he had a party.[5]

Matthew-Levi recognized that Jesus was offering him a higher calling. He was making money at his job. He probably was making

4. Matthew was one of three brothers who became apostles. He was the son of Althaeus (Matt. 10:13; Mark 2:14). James was the son of Althaeus (Luke 6:15). Judas (not Iscariot) was the son of Althaeus (v. 16).

5. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 7.

a lot of money. He left the money behind. He owed most of it to his superiors unless he was extremely crooked: skimming off receipts. By walking away from it, he became liable to make up the difference out of his own capital. He must have had capital. He could also afford to entertain guests at a feast. He invited other tax collectors, and they came. He was probably not a low-level official. He had money to spend on entertaining and gaining influence among his peers.

Why did he walk away from his money? That was an odd thing to do. He could have turned it in. Instead, he left it sitting there. Perhaps he thought that no one would steal it. But that took considerable faith on his part. Fear of Roman soldiers might have restrained men from reaching into the box[6] to grab a handful of coins, but such theft would be difficult to prove unless soldiers were present next to Levi, which no text indicates. He must have counted the cost of losing the money that he had collected so far.

Leaving the money behind was a symbolic act. To pick up a box of money would not have required much effort. He did not pick it up. He walked away from it. He soon joined the disciples (Luke 6:15). He became an apostle (Acts 1:13). Visibly, he switched sides: from Rome to Jesus. He did so in a way that could not have failed to gain attention. Word about a Levite publican who had walked away from a box of money would have spread very fast.

Jesus had called him. He heeded the call immediately. He did not hesitate. Others did. "And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59–62).[7]

Levi's occupation was tax collecting. He left it for a calling: to be a disciple of Jesus. There was a conflict between the two. He would have found it difficult to remain a tax collector and become a disciple. Surely, he could not have been part of Jesus' closest associates, for Jesus was constantly on the move. He could not have become an apostle. But Matthew did not know anything about the apostolate. All he knew was that Jesus had called him.

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6. I assume that he had a box or other container for the money. This is not a major assumption.

7. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 20.

2. Bad Company

When he invited other publicans to come to a party, they came. Word must have spread to them, too. One of their colleagues had walked off the job, leaving the money behind. Why? Then he invited them to come to dinner and meet the man who had called him. Here was an opportunity to get answers to their question.

Tax collectors had a bad reputation. The scribes and Pharisees linked publicans with sinners. Jesus did not deny this link. Instead, He turned their criticism against them. He was a physician who healed the sick. The guests were on the list of the sick. His critics were not on the guest list. They did not regard themselves as sick men; thus, they believed that they had no need of a physician. They were critical of the Great Physician's methods of healing, including sharing a meal with tax collectors. Jesus was condemning them. They were as sick as the guests. They were in need of healing.

Matthew had humbled himself before Jesus by walking off the job. As a man protected by Roman troops, he possessed great authority. He would soon possess greater authority as an apostle. But the road to this authority was a walk into unemployment. He possessed wealth. He would soon possess a share of God's kingdom. But that kingdom was barely visible. He had a choice of two masters: God or mammon. He chose God. There is no clearer New Testament example of a man who made the correct choice in the face of such an explicit set of circumstances. He was the opposite of the rich young ruler, who made the incorrect choice.

C. Calling

Jesus had important tasks for Matthew-Levi. The most important, presumably, was writing the first Gospel.[8] But Jesus did not call to him with this offer: "Leave the money behind, and you'll be able to write the first book in the New Testament, a book that will re-shape the world. Your name will be known by millions of people down through the ages." He just called him to follow. Matthew heeded the call.

1. Profitability

What was the most profitable thing Matthew could have done: collect taxes or write the first Gospel? In retrospect, most people

8. Because the Matthew account alone refers to the tax collector as Matthew rather than Levi, Bible scholars have assumed that he was the author of the book.

would probably say "write the book." Men want to be remembered favorably. Fame is a powerful lure; so is a good reputation. Combine the two, and you have a powerful offer. Jesus did not verbally offer the first. The second—a good reputation—was part of the deal, but only by comparison to the universally bad reputation of tax collectors. He would go from being despised by nearly everyone to being misunderstood by many and hated by a few.

To gain this long-term profit—fame and a good name—he would have to pay. What he paid was the income that he would otherwise have received. This payment was symbolized by the box of money he left behind. That abandoned box of money was an earnest—a down payment—on all the other money that he would not receive.

He entered a world of far greater uncertainty. He had been a tax collector. This was one of the more certain occupations in Rome.[9] Income was assured: a form of rent. In contrast, it was not clear to him where the income would come from as Jesus' disciple, wandering the roads of Judaea. Matthew became an entrepreneur. He chose uncertainty over rent. He ceased being a Roman bureaucrat.

There was no question that he was not going to have the same level of money income as a follower of Jesus. He knew that. He demonstrated this understanding by walking away from the money box. He was abandoning his occupation. Why? Because he had been called to something more profitable. He had received a higher calling.

His calling was in opposition to his occupation. What do I mean by his calling? I mean that way of life and that work which Jesus would assign to him. This was the most important work he could do. He could make more money on the old job, but this work was not very important compared to Jesus' work. Money income was higher as a tax collector, but money income was less profitable to him than Jesus' work. He was faced with a choice: occupation or calling. He chose the calling.

I define that calling as follows: *the most important work a person can do in which he would be most difficult to replace*.[10] The account of Matthew's calling is illustrative of this definition. Jesus had a new career for him. His old career was profitable financially, but he could be replaced. There is no doubt that the tax collecting agency hired a re-

9. Two centuries later, it was equally certain but one of the most burdensome occupations. Tax collectors had to pay the state, despite their future revenue, which fell as Rome became impoverished. It became an inherited office which could not be abandoned. It became a form of slavery.

10. Gary North, "The Calling," *Christian Reconstruction* (March/April 1981).

placement. We do not know his name. He is no longer important. He was important to himself, his employers, and the taxpayers, but he is no longer important. He left no visible legacy. Matthew did.

The Gospel of Matthew cannot be replaced. The other three Gospels supplement it, but they did not replace it. It is only in Matthew's account that we are told of the virgin birth of Christ, although one passage in Luke presupposes the virgin birth: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli" (Luke 3:23). It is only in Matthew that we read the account of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).[11] Can you imagine the history of the church without these two passages?

2. Non-Monetary Bidding

Matthew's choice was not based on monetary income. The organization that employed him paid more money than Jesus offered. Jesus offered nothing in the way of monetary compensation. This is typical for most people. Their place of highest-value service is rarely their place of greatest monetary income.

A bidding war was in progress. The organization that employed him had bid up his income to keep him in a job that suffered from a major social liability. Jesus offered him nothing except discipleship. He had a choice: remain a social pariah or become a social eccentric. Go with the money or go with . . . what? God and mammon were bidding against each other. The high bid wins, but the individual must decide in terms of his own scale of values what the high bid is. Rarely is the high monetary bid the high bid from God's point of view. "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24).[12]

Callings are only occasionally salary-producing occupations, such as minister of the gospel or teacher. Because so few men are ever directly confronted with a choice between calling and occupation, they

11. Chapter 48. See also Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

12. Chapter 38.

do not think much about their callings. They may think more about this when they reach their mid-40s, when they see their mortality more clearly. But the kind of life-changing decision that Matthew made is rare. Few men ever hear the call of God so plainly.

D. The Division of Labor

The division of labor has increased dramatically in the modern world ever since the late eighteenth century. Occupations have become more specialized. Low-level or entry-level jobs have become plentiful. It does not take seven years of apprenticeship training to teach a person to be a clerk in a fast food restaurant. It takes just a few days. But it takes far more training to become a physician than it did in medieval times. The assembly line of the modern factory has made average men productive, but factory jobs tend to move to less developed nations or regions. It takes more education and training to become a knowledge worker than an assembly-line worker.

As specialization increases, people find more opportunities to exercise their talents. They achieve greater productivity because their creativity progressively matches customer demand. They find their niche in the labor market. This benefits customers, who gain a wider selection of products and services to choose from, and more highly skilled producers working to serve them.

Were it not for the decrease in the cost of information, it would be increasingly difficult to replace workers in the capital-intensive job market. Information costs have dropped, however, offsetting the fact that the closer a person's skills match the requirements of the production process, the more difficult it is to find his replacement. To retain him in the production process, his employer must pay him enough to keep him from seeking employment elsewhere. Because of more accurate and more widely available information about rates of pay, people can bargain to their advantage with employers. Meanwhile, employers can locate replacements. The zones of ignorance have narrowed, meaning that workers are paid closer to what their services are worth to the customer by way of the employer. Only a few people in the organization provide such unique services that the organization's decision-makers cannot replace them readily.

Job-switching is common today. Men seek out better-paying jobs. They are not locked into one job for life. When a person asks: "What is my most productive area of service?" he means for a few years. Men change their occupations and their specialties within organizations.

The bidding war for jobs goes on, day by day. The results can be seen in the price of labor. But nothing comparable exists for the bidding system for callings. There is no visible indicator comparable to the money wage. There is no numerical value that men can place on the calling. While there has been an increase in information regarding callings, there is nothing comparable to the wage system.

With the increase in the division of labor, callings have become more specialized. But without a unique numerical success indicator, the participants and would-be participants in the market for highest service are still as blind, comparatively, as Matthew was. When God calls us into service, He does not present us with an employment contract enforceable in a court of law, with fringe benefits listed. He just says, "Hey, you! Come." There is great uncertainty. Why some men respond while others do not remains a mystery. They do not base this decision on quantitative measures. There is some unexplained factor that is at work in God's issuing of a call. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God" (Deut. 29:29a).

Because we cannot know the future exhaustively, an element of faith exists in every decision. What distinguishes market decisions is the degree of specificity possible in assessing the future. There are prices. Prices are the result of men's decisions regarding the present value of expected future supply and demand. Men bid for resources in terms of these assessments. The result of this bidding process is an array of prices. So, there is less faith required to make a market decision than a decision regarding the calling. Accepting a calling is more like taking a wife than hiring a housekeeper. The potential is greater, a mistake is more permanent, and the terms of employment are less specific.

Conclusion

Matthew had to make a decision. He had to assess the call of Christ and compare its potential with that of his occupation. No decision would still have been a decision: to stay right where he was. He made his decision in an instant. We are not told what factors motivated him. Maybe it was only that Christ had called him, despite his position as a social outcast. Maybe he had been looking for a way out the tax collection field. Or maybe it was something beyond his own power to explain. He wrote the account, yet he did not explain his motivation.

Jesus' call persuaded him to act in terms of his priorities. Because he had not sought out Jesus, I assume that the call initiated a ma-

jor shift in these priorities. The visible indicator of this shift was the money box. The more radical the shift, the less likely that he would take the box with him. Would he trust money or Christ, mammon or God? He trusted Christ.

22

NO VISIBLE RESERVES

> *But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.*
>
> MATTHEW 10:6–10

The theocentric focus of this passage is God as the paymaster: sanctions.[1] He sustains His workers. The worthy workman will receive his meat.

A. Bringing Israel Under Judgment

The context of this passage is the condemnation of Israel. The means of this condemnation was evangelism. "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:5–8). It sounds as though Jesus was offering positive sanctions only through His disciples. But the negative sanctions were also present. "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues" (Matt. 10:14–17). Jesus knew that the disciples would not be received with open arms. He also knew that God's judgment against Israel would come (Matt. 24; Luke 21).[2]

This was not an ordinary strategy of evangelism. The fact that Jesus forbade them from going to gentile cities, or even Samaritan cities, is indicative of the special nature of this assignment. He was sending them to the covenant people in order to gain a few converts and condemn the nation.

This was, in effect, preliminary to another exodus. Just as Moses had confronted Pharaoh inside the boundaries of Egypt, so would they confront opponents. Like Pharaoh, these opponents would bring negative sanctions against them. Like Moses, they would receive supernatural aid that would enable them to deal with their opponents. "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:19–20). The first phase of the exodus took place immediately after the stoning of Steven. "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). The second phase took place sometime prior to the Roman army's final surrounding of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (According to ancient church tradition, the Jerusalem church fled to the gentile city of Pella.)[3]

Jesus was commanding them to bring a covenant lawsuit against Israel. By announcing the advent of a new kingdom, they were announcing the end of the Old Covenant order. This was done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus wanted them to learn that the Spirit was with them. He sent them among wolves in order to break their fear of the established order.

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2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987). Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

3. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Isaac Boyle, trans. (Grand Rapids: Baker, [325?] 1955), III:V, p. 86.

B. Money and Uncertainty

"The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).[4] The rich man trusts in his money. He expects it to shield him from catastrophes, just as a wall shielded an ancient city. The disciples were ordered not to carry money with them. Then what would serve as their high wall? God.

Money is the most marketable commodity. Put differently, it is the most liquid asset. This means that money can be sold (exchanged for assets) rapidly and without transaction costs. Men hold money because they cannot accurately foresee the future. They do not know what opportunities will arise. They want to be able to take advantage of these opportunities. They do not know what kind of calamities will arise. They want to be able to buy their way out of these calamities. Money is their means of taking action. Because of money's liquidity, its holders have a wide range of options available to them. They reduce their costs of information by accumulating money.

Jesus sent them into an uncertain environment without money. He told them in general what would happen to them. Some people would welcome them. Others would persecute them. Through all of their experiences, the Holy Spirit would guide them and protect them. The Spirit was above circumstances. They could rely on Him to be their high wall.

Money is a tool. Men own this tool. They grow confident in the use of this tool. They grow confident in themselves as tool masters. Jesus was telling the disciples that their own efforts would not be the source of their success or protection. They could not manipulate the Holy Spirit in the way that they could manipulate money. They would be in the Spirit's hands; He would not be in their hands. He would put the proper words in their mouths. He would not echo their words.

The dominion hierarchy is God > man > nature (Gen. 1:27–28).[5] Jesus was warning them against having faith in autonomous man's hierarchy: man > money > other men. The task He was giving them was beyond anything that money would buy.

He was giving them a preliminary assignment, just as God gave Moses. This assignment was designed to increase trust in God's sov-

4. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

ereignty over history. They faced considerable uncertainty. The future is never uncertain to God. Jesus was teaching them that *the most effective way to deal with uncertainty is to trust in God*. To trust in the most marketable commodity is legitimate, though exclusive trust is idolatry. Proverbs refers to it as conceit. The same Hebrew word is used for an idol.[6]

C. Spiritual Reserves

If they were not to trust in the most marketable commodity, then what about a fall-back position? What about spare clothing? Jesus forbade that, too. Nothing that they could carry in their purses or on their backs would suffice. Only the Spirit of God would suffice.

They would have reserves: God's Spirit. This is always sufficient. Yet in His grace, God does not ask us to avoid other reserves. This assignment was unique. It was a training mission. Just before His crucifixion, He reminded them: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22:35b–36). What had been appropriate for a training mission would not be appropriate in the future. This did not mean that they would no longer have to rely on the Spirit. The Spirit would come in full force only after Christ's ascension (John 14:26; 16:7; Acts 1:8). From that point on, the disciples would be fully equipped: Spirit, purse, and sword.

The training mission was a means of strengthening their faith. This meant that they had to learn to trust in invisible reserves. Men find it very difficult to do this. They must be trained to do this. Moses was not ready for his assignment at the time that he first met God at the burning bush. Men trust in what they can see and what they have learned through successful experiences. Jesus removed their visible reserves in order that they might gain successful experiences. He reminded them of their success just before His crucifixion. They still did not believe Him. They still had not learned. It took the crowing of the cock for Peter to learn. In the passage immediately preceding His reminder of their successes without a purse, Jesus prophesied Peter's public denial of Him. It was that event, rather than the triumph

6. "Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any **image** of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 26:1).

of the empty purse, that finally persuaded him. It was his prophesied failure, not his previous success, that enabled him to put his trust where it belonged. Yet both events were essentially of the same character. Both stripped Peter of autonomous reserves. The first left him without money; the second left him without honor.

D. Predictable Payment

Jesus sent them among wolves. He sent them out in what appeared to be a defenseless condition. It was important for them to learn not to trust in their own strength. Their own strength was too puny. Their own reserves were too minimal. They had to trust in God's reserves. They could do this because of God's adherence to His own principle of payment: "The workman is worthy of his meat." The parallel passage in Luke puts it this way: "...the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house" (Luke 10:7b). God does not expect His people to work for free.

At the same time, He expects His workers to serve others. "Freely ye have received, freely give." Just as He supplies His workers with whatever they need to do their work, so are they to serve those who have not yet entered the kingdom. Jesus said that they would be sustained miraculously. Similarly, they would perform miracles. For this, they would earn the hostility of the wolves.

God's principle of payment means that even though His servants do not now possess visible reserves, they can expect them. "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). The servant of God receives; he is therefore to lend freely. "He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed" (Ps. 37:26).[7] The servant can become a visible blessing to others because he knows, in the familiar phrase, "there's more where that came from." Furthermore, this stream of predictable income extends to his children.

Uncertainty is reduced by a stream of income. The greater the predictability of this income, the less the uncertainty. The economist calls a stream of income *rental income*. An asset generates income. Men who seek asset-generated income are called *rent-seekers*. They seek to gain reduced uncertainty by buying a stream of income.

In contrast is the entrepreneur. He thrives on uncertainty. He knows that it is through the conversion of uncertainty into certainty

7. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

that he can gain a profit. When he converts an uncertain future into a more predictable future, he gains a stream of income. He can then sell this stream of income for money. He capitalizes it. Rent-seekers will pay to buy it. He profits because he perceived a stream of future income where his competitors did not. They did not offer what the stream of income was worth. The entrepreneur places his capital at risk by buying the otherwise unpredicted income stream and converting it into a predictable stream. For this service he gains a one-time entrepreneurial profit—an above-average return on his invested capital.[8]

God's people are supposed to become bearers of uncertainty. They are to gain kingdom profits, the parable of the talents tells us (Matt. 25:14–30).[9] But uncertainty has its downside. Sometimes men forecast incorrectly. They lose their capital. What they thought would be a stream of income turns out to be a sink-hole for their capital.

The parable used the language of commerce to explain kingdom expansion. What Jesus told the disciples before sending them on their mission was that God would supply them with whatever they required. What appeared to them initially as a highly uncertain project without visible means of support would be well-supplied. If they did their work faithfully, they would receive what they needed to continue.

Their faith, coupled with a supernaturally guaranteed supply of income, would enable them to do effective kingdom work. What appeared to be uncertain was in fact certain. They needed faith to begin. They needed visible confirmation to continue.

Uncertainty is the major barrier to entry. It is what keeps out competitors who would bid up the price of the resources and tools needed to produce the stream of income. This is what enables people with very little capital to become rich. They see an opportunity—or sense it—where others do not perceive it. They enter the market with whatever reserves they possess and commit it to developing the stream of income. Like gold prospectors with a newly discovered tattered map or inventors with a dream, they rush in where competitors fear to tread.

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8. The profit occurs once, for after the rise in the capitalized price of the asset, the owner reaps only an average rate of return. If it is worth an ounce of gold when he buys it and 10 ounces after his efforts, he can sell it for 10 ounces. The buyer will earn an average rate of return on his investment of 10 ounces. But what is true of the buyer is also true of the entrepreneur if he decides not to sell the asset. The income stream he receives is an average rate of return on the new value of the asset.

9. Chapter 47.

Jesus told them that God's payment was predictable. They could trust God. They could therefore safely rush in where others feared to tread. And so they did. This tiny band of men without visible capital began a ministry that has transformed the world.

Conclusion

This was a special assignment. It became a standard that should remind men of what God can do, just as the miracles in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea were to remind Israel of what God can do. Such miracles were not supposed to become familiar events. The manna ceased when Israel crossed the Jordan by another miracle of divided waters (Josh. 5:12). After that, they were to plant and build. Similarly, Jesus told the disciples immediately prior to His crucifixion to get a purse and a sword. They were not to forget what God had done for them. He specifically reminded them of what God had done for them. But He told them to use conventional reserves—capital—to pursue their callings.

They were to establish priorities in their valuation of capital: God first, then money and a weapon. They were to trust the Spirit first; then they were to trust in visible reserves. No asset is to be spared in the extension of God's kingdom. It is not that we are to work without assets. It is that we are to subordinate our visible reserves to God's invisible reserves.

Perhaps the greatest example of invisible reserves is found in Elisha's lesson to his servant. "And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (II Kings 6:15–17). Seeing is believing. But not every servant of God is enabled to see in this way. He must accept on faith the testimony of the Bible that his covenantal predecessors have seen such things. What they saw strengthened them. What we read should strengthen us.

23

CONFIDENT FEAR

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

MATTHEW 10:29–31

The underlying theocentric principle here is God's omniscience. He sees everything. He is sovereign: point one of the biblical covenant[1] The practical application of this principle is this: God's people, being worth more than an inexpensive bird, should have confidence in His support.

A. Omniscience and Entrepreneurship

Omniscience is one of the incommunicable attributes of God. God knows everything. This is one aspect of His infinity. Not being omniscient, man cannot comprehend infinity. Jesus therefore discussed God's infinity in terms that men can understand, such as knowing the number of hairs on a man's head. No man can count them because he will lose track of which hairs he has already counted. Meanwhile, some hairs will fall out. We know only that the number of hairs is many.

The philosophical implications of God's omniscience are many, but this much is sure: *nothing surprises God*. Nothing sneaks up on Him. Therefore, His people should not allow their surprise to paralyze them. They are in His sight and His care. Men are vulnerable to the unexpected. This vulnerability is an aspect of man's lack of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

omniscience. But if a man is part of God's remnant, this vulnerability is temporary. To the extent that he is acting as a dominion agent, he can overcome the challenge of the unknown. He does so by means of his own efforts, but also by the joint efforts of church members. He is not alone. God is with him, and the church is with Him.

Another implication is that cause and effect are not random. There is no zone of indeterminacy for God. He knows both the location and speed of the electron and the galaxy. Man is not trapped in a world governed by chance.

A third implication is that life is not a discovery process for God. He never discovers anything that He did not know before.

Man sees the future as through a glass, darkly. He can be surprised. Lots of things sneak up on him. For him, cause and effect often seem random. Life is a discovery process for man. Because of these limitations on man's knowledge, man is necessarily an entrepreneur.

The entrepreneur confronts uncertainty. He must deal with it. He looks into the future and makes decisions in the present. He takes action in the present. He exchanges one set of circumstances for another in the present. He does not do this with complete confidence unless he is a fool. He does not know the outcome of his actions because he does not know everything that contributes to cause and effect in history. The complexity of life is too much for man to deal with. He deals with creation representatively: by models and laws. The question is: Which models and which laws?

Reality is complex. It is interdependent. Anything can affect anything else, or so some people think. Perhaps everything else affects anything, or at least could affect anything under certain circumstances. We do not know, for we are not omniscient. We cannot make sense of infinity. Biblically speaking, there are degrees of infinity. It comes in varying sizes. The infinitude of the creation is less than the infinitude of God, in a way analogous to the infinitude of eternity, which it is less for resurrected men than for God, who got here first.

Men could not act rationally if they had to know everything exhaustively before they could know anything truly.[2] They would be paralyzed. Men make decisions based on information that constitutes a nearly infinitesimal amount of data. Yet they make progress. They learn. For them, life is a discovery process.

The entrepreneur tries to discover coherence in the present so that he can improve his situation in the uncertain future. A successful en-

2. Cornelius Van Til made this point repeatedly.

trepreneur learns from his successes and his errors. He improves his decision-making ability. Out of the mists of uncertainty comes information in the form of feedback. The feedback that he receives from reality enables him to deal more successfully with reality the next time.

Men are supposed to pray for wisdom (James 1:5–8). This wisdom is from above, but it is also from this world. Men are to ask for a clearer understanding of their restricted area of responsibility, i.e., their zone of dominion. They should expect to receive this information from the God who is larger than infinity and above it. But covenantal wisdom is more than knowing; it is also obeying. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). We learn by doing.

B. Reducing Our Fear of the Future

God is aware when a sparrow falls. How important is a sparrow? Less important than a man. We cannot measure how much less important, but we know that it is less important.

Jesus used this contrast to persuade His followers that their concerns are known to God. God is not some distant monarch who does not know what is happening. He is omniscient. He can see the sparrow fall; He can see us fall. He is present with the sparrow when it falls; He is present with us when we fall.

For the covenant-keeper, this information is intended to reduce his fear of the future. "Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." The future should be terrifyingly fearful for covenant-breakers, but not for covenant-keepers. The reason why it should not be fearful for covenant-keepers is because God is omnipotent. He brings His eternal decree to pass in history. This is the message of the last four chapters of Job. There is no uncertainty for God.

Job was not afraid of the future. He was confused by the past. He despaired because of the covenantal unpredictability of the future—the lack of correspondence between his faithfulness and the visible results. It was not that he was cut down; it was that he was cut down for no apparent covenantal reason. There seemed to be a discrepancy between covenantal predictability—blessings for obedience—and his sacramental past and unpleasant present. As a forecaster, he had failed to foresee these events. He was unable to make sense of cause and effect. His past gave him no useful information about his expected future. As an entrepreneur, he had previously been successful in dealing with uncertainty. He had obeyed God, and He had

prospered. But cause and effect had become worse than random; it had become perverse. This baffled him. God's answer was clear: "I'm God; you're not. I get to do what I want."

The reason why the Book of Job is so difficult to explain is that this answer seems to deny covenantal cause and effect. But this is not the book's message. On the contrary: "So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses" (Job 42:12). But in the interim, God did what He pleased. When dealing with fallen man, God's law is all grace, and so is covenantal cause and effect. Man has no legal claim on God, for man is in rebellion. It is grace alone that brings positive sanctions and restricts negative ones.

We are not to fear the future, because God is in control of the future, and we are His adopted children. He cares for us. Whatever happens to us is not a mistake on God's part. Our temporal and temporary afflictions are not the result of God's absent-mindedness. They are part of our lifelong discovery process. What we are supposed to discover is that God loves His people and has a wonderful plan for their lives (Mal. 1:2; Rom. 9:13a).

Fear thwarts this discovery process. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (I John 4:18). God's love is perfect. It casts out fear. Our love is imperfect. The proof of this imperfection is our fear. We are tormented by fear. This thwarts our progressive sanctification.

Yet we also know that fear is an attribute of faith. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever" (Ps. 111:10). So, the deciding factor is not fear but the object of our fear. Do we fear God or the creation? Jesus had already made it plain to the disciples what we are to fear. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). This leads us to another conclusion: God hates His enemies and has a horrible plan for their lives (Mal. 1:3; Rom. 9:13b).

C. Fear of God and Confidence in the Future

Men are told to fear God. He is over the creation. By fearing God, men subordinate themselves to Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Men are told not to fear those who can kill them. This means that no aspect of the creation should make men afraid, *as long as they are doing God's work*. The creation is a threat to those who are in rebellion against God. It testifies against them.

So, men are to fear God and remain confident regarding the future. If they are legitimately confident about their eternal future, then they should remain confident about the temporal future. Covenant-breakers are threatened far more by hell than by death. They are threatened far more by God than by any aspect of the creation. The limit of the creation's negative sanctions is death. In a world of sin, this fact should reinforce the hierarchical aspect of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28).[3] The covenant-keeper is subordinate to God; therefore, he is the delegated king of creation in his legitimate area of responsibility.

Uncertainty should therefore be less of a barrier to entry for the covenant-keeper than for the covenant-breaker. Covenant-keepers should be willing to take big chances for the sake of extending God's kingdom in history. Covenant-keepers' fear of the future thwarts their work in extending the kingdom. It is proof of their lack of love toward God. They must fear God above all and love God above all.

Confidence in the future of the kingdom encourages a man to take risks for the sake of God's kingdom, even though he may fail. The entrepreneur knows that many projects fail for every great one that is achieved. What is true in the experience of one entrepreneur is also true for the kingdom. Many men's work may come to naught as far as they and others can see, but in the corporate realm of God's kingdom, they play a part. There is a pattern in life that was first discovered by the late-nineteenth century sociologist-economist, Vilfredo Pareto. It is called the 80-20 rule. About 80% of a system's productivity comes from 20% of its resources. Conversely, 80% of its problems comes from 20% of its operations. This means that the productivity of the 20% rests on the other 80%, which contributes the seemingly unproductive support elements in the system. Something like this rule seems to operate in God's kingdom. A tiny minority of successful churches get most of the publicity, but the multitude of little ones that get no recognition meet the spiritual needs of the vast majority of Christians. For over two centuries, the average Protestant congregation in the United States has been about 75 to 100 adult

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

members.[4] There have been a few large, influential congregations in every era, but the little ones do the unspectacular maintenance work of the kingdom.

Similarly, there are failures. Some men work to plant churches that never take root. Some foreign missions programs fail to impact local communities, or seem to. Christians send money to non-profit organizations that never seem to prosper. Pioneering efforts often do little more than clear a rough path through a large forest. Civilization later follows some of these rough paths, but not all of them. Of those paths followed, most will eventually be abandoned, to be grown over with trees, leaving little trace. This is the risk of becoming a pioneer. Civilization may not follow your path. But without pioneers, there would be no paths. *The price of civilization includes the paths that failed*. Some pioneers fail. God does not fail. His work goes forward. If a man works for the sake of the kingdom, he can be confident about the success of his efforts. They may not produce the crop he hopes for, but they are part of God's comprehensive plan. The pioneer is doing his work faithfully. He will receive his reward, either in history or in eternity. Paul wrote:

> I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (I Cor. 3:6–15).[5]

4. It was about 75 members in 1776. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, [1992] 1994), pp. 24, 26. In 1998, average church attendance at Protestant churches was 91. It had been 100 in 1997, 102 in 1992, and 98 in 1987. Barna Research Group, "Profile of American Churches Shows Them to be Conservative, Evangelical, Seeker-Sensitive—and Losing Ground" (Sept. 8, 1998).

5. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed.(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

The confidence that a covenant-keeping man has in God should motivate him to sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom. God will bless his efforts. Other men who do not have this confidence will tend to turn back, but the man of faith moves forward. The kingdom of God moves forward towards the conquest of the world because covenant-keepers remain faithful in their tasks. The slow, steady, plodding work of millions of faithful people is what produces long-term victory. Their confidence in this fact encourages them to stick to their tasks, come hell or high water.

Conclusion

The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. The fear of the creation is therefore the beginning of foolishness. If men fear the creation—circumstances—more than they fear God, they will have a hard time taking risks. They will hold onto what they have and sit tight. This does not lead to world conquest. But if they fear neither God nor man, they are fools. They will take big risks on their own behalf. They will probably lose, for most new ventures fail, but even if they succeed, they will lose. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

God cares about His people. He may lead them into disasters, just as He led the remnant of Israel into captivity along with the sinful majority, but He brings His good work to pass in history. The captivity of the remnant had a purpose. It made their faith stronger, as we see in the case of the three young men in Nebuchadnezzar's court. They feared God more than fire. "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:16–18). Their testimony in the face of death led to the king's profession of faith (Dan. 4). We remember this story, but what we can be sure of is the fact that there were other faithful Israelites in the land whose prayers and simple obedience made possible the survival of Israel in a foreign land. The three men were spectacular representatives of God who demonstrated publicly what God can do. But the day-to-day preservation of the faithful is God's conventional means of extending His kingdom. We are to honor the memory of the three young men because we need evidence of God's

faithfulness to us. We are to honor the memory of Christ's bodily resurrection for the same reason. Death, the great enemy, will be progressively overcome in history (Isa. 65:17–20). "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:25–26).

Jesus' resurrection is at one end of the spectrum of God's protection in history. God's care for the sparrows is at the other end. We are somewhere in between, but closer to Jesus, our covenantal representative, than to the sparrows.

When we believe this, it should be easier for us to set our priorities. We are to decide what to do, not in terms of fear of the future but it terms of what benefits God's kingdom. The fear of negative sanctions from the creation is not to restrain us when we count the cost (Luke 14:28–34).[6] Fear of man or the creation is not to be factored into these cost projections. We are not to deny the existence of risk. Risk we will always have with us. But we are to set our priorities in terms of what is best for the kingdom of God, not what is safest for us. The Book of Jonah is the premier testimony to this truth. Avoid whales.

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

24

LIFE: LOST AND FOUND

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

MATTHEW 10:39

The theocentric principle here is that Jesus Christ is the Lord of life. This implies that He is also the Lord of death. The Bible tells us this specifically. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev. 1:18). Life and death are in Jesus Christ's hands. This is an aspect of God's sovereignty: point one of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Life Is the Crucial Capital Asset

Without life, we can accomplish nothing. This is why the author of Ecclesiastes wrote, "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion" (Eccl. 9:4). David wrote: "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?" (Ps. 30:9).

Jesus announced that the man who finds his life will lose it. This is a peculiar saying. What was He getting at? To find out, we must consider the second half: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." The distinguishing feature here is the phrase, "for my sake." The man who loses his life shall find it if he loses it for Christ's sake. The positive sanction—gaining life—comes as a result of losing one's life for Christ's sake.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

This implies that the discovery of life in the first half of the statement has something to do with false worship. A man thinks he has found his life on some basis other than Jesus Christ's sovereignty. He has found life for something else's sake. Because he has worked to find life for something other than Christ's sake, he is faced with ultimate loss. He will lose his life. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Eternal life is also the supreme form of grace. It is God's unearned gift to man. Temporal life is analogous to eternal life, though not equally valuable in God's eyes. It is a gift of God. As with any gift in a fallen world, it can be misused. Some covenant-breaking men view temporal life as supreme. Others view life lived for the sake of a false god as supreme. This passage makes it clear that temporal life lived for Christ's sake is supreme. This implies that temporal life lived for Christ's sake is an aspect of eternal life.

In this passage, life is representative of capital. Eternal life is the supreme form of capital in history. Temporal life is next. Gold, silver, and other forms of wealth are secondary to life. This is why men will sometimes pay large sums to hospitals and physicians in the hope of extending their lives. Other things being equal, the marginal value of longer life is greater than the marginal value of assets that can be enjoyed only in life. Other things may have more value to an individual than temporal life: personal honor, personal reputation, children's inheritance. But without life, no one can enjoy the income generated by capital.

Finding life is desirable. If life is worth more than capital, then securing capital is secondary to finding life. This puts capital in its proper perspective. It is a tool of life. The individual uses capital. He seeks to attain his goals by means of capital. But if his quest for capital undermines the goal of life, meaning life lived for Christ's sake, meaning eternal life, then it is a foolish quest. Covenant-breaking men too often forget this principle. Riches usually testify against the wise judgment of those who possess great capital. "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24).[2] There can be exceptions (v. 26), but these are rare.

By using life as the goal of the quest, Jesus invoked most men's supreme goal. So, if a man's quest for life and his seeming attainment of life lead to the loss of his life, then surely the same is true of all other

2. Chapter 38.

goals: money, power, fame, etc. What is true of a primary quest must also be true of secondary quests.

B. Temporal Applications

Jesus taught clearly that eternal life and death are attained temporally. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). Life lived for Christ's sake is eternal life. Life lived for anything else's sake is eternal death, i.e., the loss of eternal life. The concern here is eternal life.

oes this have implications for temporal life? Yes. In this passage, finding life and losing life are accomplished in the present. One person believes he has found life in history. The other knows that he has lost his life in history. In other words, he has *died covenantally* in history. Paul wrote: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). We are buried with Christ covenantally; therefore, we shall live with Him eternally. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:3–9). "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12).

Our new life today is secured by Christ's definitive work in the past. Our new life is sealed by our baptism: judicial death and resurrection. We must *die judicially* in order to *live eternally*. This is what it means to lose our lives for Christ's sake. Conversely, to live by anything other than Christ's definitive work in the past is to secure eternal death. It is to affirm the sovereignty of something other than Jesus Christ. It is to hope in eternal deliverance from the torments

of hell and the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14–15) on some basis other than Christ's perfect judicial work.

What was *accomplished judicially in history by Christ* serves as the basis of the *extension of His kingdom in history*. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).[3] This is the Great Commission. What Jesus *accomplished representatively and definitively in history*, His people are to manifest progressively in history. This is the meaning of the Great Commission.[4]

C. Baptism and Life

The Great Commission is given to individuals and corporate bodies, beginning with the institutional church, which alone can lawfully baptize. Covenant-keepers place themselves under its jurisdiction through baptism. Life lived for Christ is lived judicially through baptism, as Paul taught. Baptism publicly incorporates us into Christ's life though the church.

The old dogma, "there is no salvation outside the church," is true. The church is the incorporated body of Christ. While a redeemed person can be outside of membership in a church, this judicial status is abnormal for the believer. The sacraments are available only in and through the institutional church. Life is found only in the church. The public death of the old sinful man through baptism is the mark of the new life. We lose our lives in baptism and thereby find life. The life we find is an earnest—a down payment—on eternal life. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:11–14).

The church is the model for other corporate endeavors. It is not

3. Chapter 48.

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

based on biology, as the family is. It is based on confession. Membership is open to all confessing people, unlike the family, which is a closed institution.[5] The unity of purpose that a shared confession establishes enhances men's efforts to achieve both their personal goals and corporate goals. Paul used the metaphor of the body to describe the interdependent life of the church (Rom. 12;[6] I Cor. 12[7]) seventeen centuries before Adam Smith described the capital-intensive division of labor of the pin-making factory. Corporate efforts are more effective than isolated individual efforts. Without corporate structures to serve as vessels of vision, the individual's efforts are tightly circumscribed: capital constraints, insufficient skills, insufficient information, and short life expectancy. We extend God's kingdom in history through our cooperative efforts. To imagine that isolated individual efforts in spiritual affairs are equal in their effects to participation in the church is to imagine that the isolated inventor can achieve success without factory production.

Conclusion

Man's top priority is service to God, not eternal life. Service to God is theocentric. Life is theocentric. Through service to God, a man demonstrates his possession of eternal life, meaning life lived for Christ's sake. By placing anything other than life lived for Christ as his top priority, a man becomes anthropocentric.

The public manifestation of the attainment of eternal life is participation in the sacraments. These are corporate marks of individual conditions. Incorporation is vital to the life of the believer. It is also vital to the extension of God's kingdom.

What is said here of life applies far more forcefully to lesser goals. He who finds his riches solely in history has lost riches in eternity. He who finds his riches in a promise of eternal inheritance gains riches in history. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).[8]

5. Adoption is possible, but not legally mandatory.

6. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd electronic edition (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

7. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

8. Chapter 15.

25

LIGHTLY YOKED

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

MATTHEW 11:28–30

The theocentric principle here is that Jesus Christ is the one who can give rest to men. The promise of rest is sabbatical. The sabbath is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant.[1] Christ is Lord of the sabbath (Matt. 12:8).[2]

A. Yoke: An Inescapable Concept

The yoke is an aspect of work—specifically, for beasts of burden. The Lord of the sabbath is also Lord of work. The implication here is that Christ is Lord of the week. The lightness of His yoke is manifested by the sabbath. He who honors the weekly day of rest testifies to the lightness of the yoke in his life.

Men must work. They grow weary. They seek rest. Christ offers rest to weary men. He then calls them to bear a yoke. Christ's yoke is a means of lightening their load, of giving them rest.

How can more be less? How can adding a burden lighten a man's load? The implication here is that men are already burdened down. Specifically, they are burdened with sin. Sin exacts a heavy toll. It in-

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Pont Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24. Cf. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Chapter 26.

terferes with man's dominion. So do the results of original sin: weeds and thorns (Gen. 3:17–19).[3] Men labor under a curse.

This passage says that Christ's yoke is light. This is comparative. It is lighter than something else. What might that be? Another, heavier yoke. The implication is that it is not a question of yoke vs. no yoke. It is a question of whose yoke. Men cannot escape some yoke.

Masters place yokes on their work animals. Men labor under one of two masters: God or mammon (Matt. 6:24).[4] Whose yoke is preferable? Christ's. With His yoke, men can get rest. *With mammon's yoke, there is no permanent rest*. The traditional phrase, "there is no rest for the wicked," reflects this biblical truth.

A yoke has several purposes. First, it trains an animal to be subservient. It reminds the anumal that it is under authority. Second, it directs the animal's steps. It causes it to go where the master wants it to go. Third, it is attached to a plow or other tool. It is designed for pulling. All of these purposes are the master's.

A yoke restrains an animal. An animal finds it difficult to escape its environment. This is a benefit or a liability, depending on the treatment it receives from the master and the safety it is afforded in its environment. Whether this feature is a blessing or a curse depends on the master. The yoke makes the animal more productive. If the master does not share this increase with the animal, the animal is a loser: too much pulling, not enough food. The Mosaic law required the owner to share the wealth with his work animal. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4).[5]

Christ said that His yoke is light. It is less of a burden than any rival yoke. This implies that His treatment of those under his yoke will be good. They will share in their own productivity. There is an element of restraint in wearing His yoke, but this is part of an overall process in which he benefits.

The implication is that the rival yoke—mammon's—will not provide equal benefits. The master is self-serving. He extracts more from those under his authority than Christ demands from those under His authority. Mammon is man's greed.[6] Its yoke is burdensome.

Some people may think they are autonomous. If so, they will see

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

4. Chapter 14.

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62.

6. Chapter 14.

Christ's yoke as an extra burden, one which they can avoid. But their assumption of autonomy is incorrect. They are under authority. They wear a yoke. They may be used to its weight. They may not perceive that it is extracting a heavy toll on them. They are operating under an illusion. They are not autonomous. Adam placed all mankind under another yoke. It can be removed only by the substitution of a lighter yoke.

A wise man recognizes the weight of his yoke. But if he has nothing to compare it with, he must make a decision based on faith. Not all men believe Christ's words, which must be taken on faith. His yoke is light. He was saying that a man's present yoke is heavy. A man can exchange a heavy yoke for a light one. But to see the advantage, he must feel the weight of his existing yoke.

Christ announced this regarding Himself: "I am meek and lowly in heart." His incarnation is proof of this statement. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5–8).[7] "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9). The psychological basis of Jesus Christ's victory was His humility. He subordinated Himself to God the Father and then to evil men. In doing this, He established the judicial basis of the victory of His people. As a perfect man, He achieved total victory. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Phil. 2:9–10). We achieve an analogous moral victory in history, both definitively[8] and progressively, and then finally at the resurrection.

B. Rest vs. Autonomy

The weary man feels the burden. He seeks rest. Christ offers rest. He tells the laborer that there is rest available on request. He tells

7. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

8. God imputes Christ's moral perfection to His people. See North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2:D:2.

the emotionally weary person that there is rest for the soul (v. 29). But to obtain this rest, a man must admit to himself that he really is weary. He must acknowledge that he is having trouble bearing his existing work load. For the person who is still confident that he can bear his own load, this offer has little appeal. The self-proclaimed autonomous man does not want to admit that his tasks are getting beyond his ability to deal with them. To admit this would be to admit that he is not autonomous. He is dependent. But the idea of dependence alienates some men. Even if they are willing to admit that they need some help, they are unwilling to admit that they cannot complete their work without surrendering to someone who offers rest—a complete cessation of work. Christ says, in effect, "I'll take over from here." But that means surrendering to someone who denies all autonomy to others.

Christ promises rest. But this had also been promised to Israel. This is one of the themes in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:1–3). "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (vv. 9–11).

This idea is crucial: "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." *The man who has ceased from his own works has surrendered any claim to autonomy*. A man at rest is subordinate either to God or the creation. He becomes an extension of God's covenant or the creation. When he surrenders to his environment, he becomes passive. He goes into retirement. He is now at the mercy of others like himself, or else he is trapped by the impersonal forces of nature or society.

He who achieves rest in history has had to subordinate himself to another: God or nature. Either he has acknowledged God as the source of his rest and his success, or else he has acknowledged nature as the source of his rest and therefore his victory. Men who surrender to God can extend His dominion over the creation. Men who

surrender to the creation—their environment—must end any hope of making society or nature conform to their ends. They become an extension of the creation. To this extent, they become depersonalized.

C. Dominion Through Rest

Rest in the biblical sense is not passivity. In the same epistle in which we read of rest, we also read, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1–2). It is the ascended Christ who offers rest to His people. *Subordinate to the author of rest, they can work without the heavy burden of fear of failure*. This takes considerable faith—the same faith that announces that Christ's yoke is light. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. He can make both promises: rest and a light yoke.

Rest is an attitude based on a confession of faith: "I am empowered by a sovereign God to do my work. I can count on Him to bring it to fruition." Put another way, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (I Cor. 3:6–7). It is the great sin of autonomy to deny the validity of this confession. "Religion is a crutch," we are told. But a crutch is a wonderful tool for a one-legged man. He who refuses to admit his condition as a man with one leg must do without a crutch. In a world of two-legged men, he appears foolish. In a world of one-legged men who hop hither and yon, he appears normal. Sinners are one-legged people.

The mental attitude of rest requires either foolishness or else faith and self-discipline. One of the marks of the covenant-keeper with this attitude of rest is sabbath-keeping. A man who believes in Christ's promise of rest knows he can afford to rest one day in seven. God is fully in control. God has told man to rest one day in seven, so man can safely do this. He will not lose anything of value by resting. A sovereign God who is the source of every blessing[9] will not let His follow-

9. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

ers suffer a loss because they exercise their prerogative and rest. They testify to their faith in the ultimate rest beyond history by resting one day in seven.

This cessation of Christians' dominion efforts one day in seven does not set back the kingdom of God. On the contrary, sabbatical rest extends it. Men are strengthened by resting. So are domesticated work animals. They can achieve more.

Conclusion

The top priority here is to accept Christ's victory in history as our own. This is our starting point for dominion, both personal and corporate. His victory *in* history is behind us: the resurrection. So is His victory *over* history: the ascension. His ascension has empowered His church. He told the apostles just before His ascension: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We can have confidence in our work because Christ's victory was definitive: complete and finished. We can extend His kingdom in history because He achieved complete victory in the past. We can rest emotionally because He is sovereign over history. We can safely rest one day in seven because He has commanded it. This sabbatical rest is a mark of the lightness of Christ's yoke. We are to acknowledge the lightness of this yoke by turning over to God our cares about the outcome of our labors. Sabbath rest is visible evidence of this confidence.

26

OPEN FIELDS AT HARVEST TIME

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

MATTHEW 12:1–2

The theocentric principle of this passage is stated clearly a few verses later: "For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day" (Matt. 12:8). It is God and God's work that govern the sabbath and its judicial applications. The sabbath is an aspect of point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Common Property

The Pharisees did not criticize the disciples for stealing. The Mosaic law exempted this activity from the laws of theft. "When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn" (Deut. 23:24–25).

Because of the importance of this passage for a correct understanding of the Bible's view of private property, I am reprinting Chapter 58 of my commentary on Deuteronomy. Some readers may not have access to that book. I have reprinted the entire chapter.

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 24. Cf. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

The theocentric principle undergirding this law is that God, as the owner of the creation, has the exclusive right to specify the terms of the leases which He offers to his stewards. His rural leasehold's contract announced to the land owner: "You do not possess absolute sovereignty over this land. Your neighbor has the right to pick a handful of grain or grapes from this field. Your right to exclude others by law or force is limited." In this sense, God delegated to a farmer's neighbors the right to enforce God's claim of exclusive control over a symbolic portion of every field. The land owner could not lawfully exclude God's delegated representatives from access to his crops. The fact that he could not lawfully exclude them testified to his lack of absolute sovereignty over his property.

In the garden of Eden, God placed a judicial boundary around one tree. This boundary was there to remind Adam that he could not legitimately assert control over the entire garden. Over most of it, Adam did exercise full authority. But over one small part, he did not. It was off-limits to him. Adam's acceptance of this limitation on his authority was basic to his continued residence in the garden. More than this: it was basic to his life. God interacted with man on a face-to-face basis in the garden. He no longer deals with man in this way. Instead, God has established a system of representative authority that substitutes for a verbal "no trespassing" sign around a designated tree. The neighbor is God's agent who comes into another man's field and announces, in effect: "This does not belong exclusively to you. As the original owner, God has a valid legal claim on it. So do I, as God's agent."

In this text, God forbade land owners from excluding visitors from their fields. A visitor had the right to pick something to eat during the harvest season. He lawfully reaped the fruits of another person's land, labor, and capital. The legal boundaries that delineated the ownership of a field did not restrict access by the visitor. The visitor had a legal claim on a small portion of the harvest. He had to appear in person to collect this portion. Put a different way, outsiders were co-owners of a portion of every field's pickable crop.

One question that I deal with later in this chapter is whether this law was a cross-boundary law rather than a seed law or land law.[2] If it

2. On the difference, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), Conclusion:C.

was a cross-boundary law, then God was making this law universal in its jurisdiction. He was announcing this system of land tenure in His capacity as the owner of the whole earth, not just as the owner of the Promised Land.

B. Exclusion by Conquest

The Israelites were about to inherit the Promised Land through military conquest. Their forthcoming inheritance would be based on the disinheritance of the Canaanites. The specified means of this transfer of ownership was to be genocide. It was not merely that the Canaanites were to be excluded from the land; they were to be excluded from history. More to the point, theologically speaking, their gods were to be excluded from history (Josh. 23:5–7).

The Israelites would soon enjoy a military victory after a generation of miraculous wandering in the wilderness (Deut. 8:4). There could be no legitimate doubt in the future that God had arranged this transfer of the inheritance. He was therefore the land's original owner. They would henceforth hold their land as sharecroppers: 10% of the net increase in the crop was to go to God through the Levitical priesthood. This was Levi's inheritance, which the tribe held in lieu of rural land (Num. 18:21).[3]

Before the conquest began, God placed certain restrictions on the use of His holy land: the formal terms of the lease. As the owner of both the land and the people who occupied it, God's restrictions were designed to protect the long-term productivity of His assets. Yet He imposed these laws for their sakes, too. Land-owning Israelites had to rest the land every seventh year (Lev. 25:4).[4] They had to allow poverty-stricken gleaners to come onto their land and pick up the leftovers of the crops (Lev. 19:9–10;[5] 23:22;[6] Deut. 24:21[7]). This passage further erased the legal boundary between the land's owners and non-owners. Whatever a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands was his to take prior to the harvest. He had legal title to this share of his neighbor's crop. It did not belong to the land owner. Ownership of land, seeds, and prior labor did not entitle him to that portion of the crop

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

4. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24.

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 22.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62.

which a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands. That is, his prior investment was not the legal basis of his ownership. *The conquest of Canaan was the legal basis of Israel's rural land ownership*.

Legal title in Israel had nothing to do with some hypothetical original owner who had gained legal title because he had mixed his labor with unowned land—John Locke's theory of original ownership.[8] There had once been Canaanites in the land, whose legal title was visibly overturned by the conquest. The Canaanites were to be disinherited, Moses announced. They would not be allowed to inherit, because they could not lawfully be neighbors. The conquest's dispossession of the gods of Canaan definitively overturned any theory of private ownership that rested on a story of man's original ownership based on his own labor. The kingdom grant preceded any man's work. The promise preceded the inheritance. In short, grace precedes law.

The neighbor in Mosaic Israel was a legal participant in the kingdom grant. He lived under the authority of God. His presence in the land helped to extend the kingdom in history. The land was being subdued by men who were willing to work under God's law. The exclusion of the Canaanites had been followed by the inclusion of the Israelites and even resident aliens. Canaan was more than Canaanites. It was also the land. The conquest of Canaan was more than a one-time military victory; it was a process. The fruits of the land belonged to all residents in the land. The bulk of these fruits belonged to land owners, but not all of the fruits.

In this sense, the resident alien who owned no land but who had legal access to the land was analogous to the beast that was employed to plow the land. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4).[9] Although the neighbor was not employed by the land owner, he was part of the overall dominion process inside Israel. The fact that God had included him inside Canaan made it more difficult for those who served other gods to occupy the land. A man's access to the courts and to the fruits of the field gave him a stake in the land, something worth defending. Israel was no pluralistic democracy. It was a theocracy. No law but God's could lawfully be enforced by the state. Only God's name could be lawfully invoked publicly inside Israel's boundaries (Ex. 23:13; Deut. 18:20). By remaining inside the land, a resident alien was publicly acknowledging his allegiance to Israel's God rather than to another god. He was ac-

8. John Locke, *On Civil Government: Second Treatise* (1690), section 27.
9. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 62.

knowledging God's legal claim on him. God in turn gave him a legal claim on a small portion of the output of the land.

C. Jesus and the Corn (Grain)

Verse 25 is the partial background for one of Jesus' more perplexing confrontations with the Pharisees.

> And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone? And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (Luke 6:1–5).

The Pharisees did not accuse the disciples of theft; rather, they accused the disciples of not keeping the sabbath. Had the disciples been guilty of theft, their critics would have taken advantage of this opportunity to embarrass Jesus through His disciples' actions, which the disciples had done right in front of Him. The reason why they did not accuse the disciples of theft was that in terms of the Mosaic law, the disciples had not committed theft. Their infraction, according to the Pharisees, was picking grain on the sabbath. Picking grain was a form of work.

Jesus' response was to cite an obscure Old Testament incident: David's confiscation of the showbread. The circumstances surrounding that incident are even more perplexing to the commentators than Jesus' walk through the field. David was fleeing from Saul. To gain five loaves of bread—surely not a life-and-death supply for a band of men[10]—David lied to a priest and confiscated the showbread, which was always to be on the table of the Lord (Ex. 25:30).

> Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee? And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know

10. There was not enough bread to save their lives from starvation. These loaves were not, in and of themselves, crucial for David's survival. But as one meal among many, the bread was part of a program of survival. These loaves might not be the last ones confiscated by David.

> any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place. Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away (I Sam. 21:1–6).

Jesus was implying that David had not done anything wrong in this incident, either by lying to a priest about his mission or by taking what belonged to God. David invoked the status of his men as holy warriors on the king's official business, which was why the priest raised the issue of their contact with women. David's answer—they had had no contact with women for three days—pointed back to the three days of abstinence prior to the giving of the law at Sinai (Ex. 19:15). David, as God's anointed heir of the throne of Israel (I Sam. 16), possessed kingly authority. Jonathan, Saul's formally lawful heir, had just re-confirmed his *inheritance-transferring oath* with David (I Sam. 20:42).[11] Because of this oath, David had the authority to lie to a priest and to take the showbread for himself and his men, even though Saul was still on the throne. To preserve his life, and therefore his God-designated inheritance, David acted lawfully. David acted as Jacob had acted when he tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing which was lawfully his by revelation and voluntary transfer by Esau (Gen. 27).[12]

The priest told David that there was no common bread available. This indicates that this was a sabbath day: no cooking. There was no fresh bread or hot bread, which was why the showbread was still there: it had not been replaced by hot bread. So, David asked for holy bread on a sabbath. There was no question about it: he was asking for holy bread on a holy day in the name of the king. The priest gave it to him. On what legal basis? The text does not say, but David's invoking of Saul's authority indicates that a man on a king's mission possessed

11. The original covenant had been marked by Jonathan's gift of his robe to David, symbolizing the robe of authority, as well as his sword (I Sam. 18:3–4).

12. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 28.

lawful authority to receive bread set aside for God if there was no other bread available. God had said, "thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway" (Ex. 25:30). But this situation was an exception which the priest acknowledged as valid. The desire of the king's men superseded this ritual requirement. There was no Mosaic law authorizing this legal principle, yet the priest accepted David's explanation, and so did Jesus. So did His critics, who did not reply. David, as the anointed future king, fed himself and his men on holy bread, based on their need to escape the wrath of the present corrupt king over Israel. Jesus, as the lawful king of Israel, allowed his men to feed themselves on the sabbath, despite the hostility of the present religious rulers, who were allied to a pagan king, Caesar. "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Because of this, within a generation, there would be neither showbread nor temple.

Unlike Calvinist commentators,[13] the Pharisees did not criticize David's actions. Jesus cited this incident in defense of His own actions. He was thereby declaring His own kingly authority. As surely as David's anointing by Samuel on God's behalf had authorized him to deceive a priest and take the showbread on the sabbath, so had the Holy Spirit's anointing of Jesus authorized Him to have His disciples pick grain on the sabbath. As surely as the king's men were authorized to eat the showbread on the sabbath, so were Christ's disciples authorized to eat newly picked grain on the sabbath. Jesus then took the matter a step further: He announced that He was Lord of the Mosaic sabbath. This meant that He was announcing more than kingly

13. Puritan commentator Matthew Poole called David's lie to the priest a "plain lie." *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1683] 1962), I, p. 565. John Gill, a Calvinistic Baptist and master of rabbinic literature, referred to David's lie as a "downright lie, and was aggravated by its being told only for the sake of getting a little food; and especially to a high priest, and at the tabernacle of God. . . . This shows the weakness of the best men, when left to themselves. . . ." John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, 4 vols. (London: William Hill Collingridge, [1764] 1853), II, pp. 196–97. Neither commentator criticized David for taking the showbread on the sabbath, which was the judicial heart of the matter. Christ sanctioned this action retroactively, which puts Christian commentators in a bind. So, they focus instead on David's lie, just as commentators focus on Rahab's lie, while refusing to raise their voices in protest against the significant ethical issue: her treason. This is a common blindness among pietistic commentators: straining at ethical gnats and swallowing what appear to be ethical camels. Cf. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), especially pp. 838–42.

authority. He was declaring His messianic heirship at this point: the son of man, Lord of the Mosaic sabbath. If David, as the prophetically anointed but not-yet publicly sanctioned king of Israel, had possessed temporary authority over a priest for the sake of his lawful inheritance of the throne, far more did Jesus Christ, as messianic heir of the kingdom of God, possess authority over the sabbath in Israel.

One thing is certain: the judicial issue was not grain-stealing.

D. A Foretaste of Bread and Wine

The visitor eats grapes in the vineyard, but he cannot lawfully carry them off his neighbor's property. He cannot make wine with what he eats. Neither can two hands full of grain make bread. This case law does not open a neighbor's field to all those who seek a finished meal. A free sample of the raw materials of such a meal is offered to visitors, but not the feast itself. This is not a harvest in preparation for a feast; it is merely *a symbol of a feast to come*. To prepare a feast, productive and successful people must bring to the kitchen sufficient fruits of the field. The full blessings of God are displayed at a feast. This case law does not offer a feast to the visitor. It offers a full stomach to a person walking in a field, but not a feast in a home or communion hall. It offers sufficient food to a hungry man to quiet the rumblings of his stomach, but it does not provide the means of celebration. It offers a token of a future feast. It is symbolic of blessings to come, a down payment or earnest of a future feast.

Grapes and grain point to the sacramental nature of the coming feast: a communion meal. The two crops singled out in this law are corn (grain) and grapes. The fact that these two crops are the raw materials for bread and wine is not some random aspect of this case law. *This law pointed forward to the communion feast of the New Covenant*. The Mosaic Covenant was, in effect, the grain and grapes that pointed forward to the New Covenant's bread and wine. The New Covenant's bread and wine in turn point forward to the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:9). The communion table of God brings together people of a common confession and a common community who look forward to the eschatological consummation of the kingdom of God in history at the end of time. So it was also in Mosaic Israel. The eschatological aspect of the Book of Deuteronomy, as the Pentateuch's book of the inheritance, provides a framework for interpreting this case law.

God gives to every man in history a foretaste of a holy meal to come: *common grace*. Not every man accepts God's invitation. Not

every man is given access to God's table, either in history or eternity. The fellowship of God is closed to outsiders by means of a common confession that restricts strangers from lawful access to the table. But a free foretaste of the bounty of God's table at the consummate marriage supper of the Lamb is given to all those who walk in the open field and pick a handful of grain. A handful of this bounty is the common blessing of all mankind. This is the doctrine of common grace.[14]

The visitor is not allowed to bring a vessel to gather up the bounty of his neighbor's field. Neither is the covenant-breaker allowed access to the Lord's Supper. The visitor is allowed access to the makings of bread and wine. Similarly, the covenant-breaker is allowed into the church to hear the message of redemption. He may gain great benefits from his presence in the congregation, or he may leave spiritually unfed. So it is with the visitor in the field. "I take no man's charity," says one visitor to a field. "Religion is a crutch," says a visitor to a church.[15] Such a willful rejection of either blessing indicates a spirit of autonomy, a lack of community spirit, and a lack of a shared environment.

E. Neighborhood and Neighborliness

Grapes and grain remain ripe enough to eat in the field only for relatively short periods of time. Either they are not yet ripe or they have just been harvested. The neighbor in Israel was not allowed to bring a vessel to carry away the produce. The presumption was that the neighbor was visiting, became hungry, and ate his fill right there in the field. This is what Jesus' disciples did. The neighbor, unless very hungry, did not walk over to the neighbor's house three times a day to get a quick meal. He had his own crop to harvest. If he was landless, he might come into a field and eat. He could even bring his family. The landless person would have gained access to free food, but only briefly, during the harvest season.

The two crops explicitly eligible for picking were above-ground crops. This law did not authorize someone to dig a root crop out of the ground. The eligible food was there, as we say in English, "for the picking." Were these two crops symbolic for all picked crops, or

14. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

15. A good reason for not passing a collection plate in church is that visitors may believe that a token payment will pay for "services rendered." So, for that matter, may non-tithing members.

did the law authorize only grapes and grain? I think the two crops were symbols of every crop that might appear on the table of a feast. This would have included fruit trees, vine-grown berries, but almost no bread grains. This meant that the hungry neighbor had a limited range of crops at his disposal.

If he was also a local farmer, then his own crop was similarly exposed. His concerted effort to harm a neighbor by a misuse of this law would have exposed him to a tit-for-tat response. If he used this law as a weapon, it could be used against him as a weapon.

Who was the neighbor? The Hebrew word, *rayah*, is most commonly used to describe a close friend or someone in the neighborhood. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Ex. 20:17).[16] It can be translated as "friend." "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers" (Deut. 13:6). It was a next-door neighbor: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it" (Deut. 19:14).[17]

But did it always mean this? In Jesus' answer to this question by the clever lawyer, He used the story of the Samaritan on a journey through Israel who helped a beaten man, in contrast to the priest and the Levite who ignored him (Luke 10).[18] Jesus was arguing that *ethics*, not friendship, confession, or place of residence, defines the true neighbor. The Samaritan was the injured man's true neighbor because he helped him in his time of need. The lawyer did not disagree with Jesus' assessment. He understood that this interpretation was consistent with the intent of the Mosaic law. This means that a law-abiding man on the road in Mosaic Israel was a neighbor. The crop owner had to treat a man on a journey as if he were a local resident. This included even a foreigner.

The Greek word used to translate *rayah* in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament is *pleision*, which means "near, close

16. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 30.

17. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 43.

18. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 22.

by."[19] This indicates that the Jewish translators regarded the neighbor as a local resident. The neighbor was statistically most likely to be a fellow member of the tribe. Rural land could not be sold permanently. It could not be alienated: sold to an alien. The jubilee law regulated the inheritance of rural land (Lev. 25).[20] This means that the neighbor in Mosaic Israel was statistically likely a permanent resident of the community.

Nevertheless, this law opened the fields to people on a journey, just as the Samaritan was on a journey. As surely as the Samaritan was the injured man's neighbor, so was the land owner the hungry traveler's neighbor. This law was a reminder to the Israelites that God had been neighborly to them in their time of need. After the exile, such permanent geographical boundaries were maintained only if the occupying foreign army so decided. Jesus walked through the field under Rome's civil authority, not Israel's.

Why would God have designated these two above-ground crops as open to neighborly picking? This law made neighbors co-owners of the fruits of a man's land, labor, and capital. The land owner was legally unable to protect his wealth from the grasping hands of non-owners. He was left without legal recourse. Why? What judicial principle undergirded this case law? What benefit to the community did this law bring which offset the negative effects of a limitation of the protection of private property? To answer this accurately, we must first determine whether this case law was a temporary law governing only Mosaic Israel or a permanent legal statute.

F. Seed Laws and Land Laws

Seed laws and land laws were temporary statutes that applied only to Mosaic Israel. I have argued previously that the seed laws of the Mosaic Covenant were tied to Jacob's messianic prophecy regarding Judah: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). Seed laws and land laws served as means of separating the tribes, thereby maintaining the continuity of each tribe until the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy, which rested on

19. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 678.

20. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24.

tribal separation.[21] The jubilee inheritance laws were land laws that were designed by God to accomplish this task.

One aspect of tribal separation was the creation of a sense of unity and participation in a larger family unit. Members of each tribe were linked together as descendants of one of the patriarchs. There was an aspect of brotherliness within a tribe that was not shared across the tribe's boundaries. There is a social distinction between brotherhood and otherhood. Boundaries mark this distinction. The main boundary for Israel was circumcision, but tribal boundaries also had their separating and unifying effects.

By allowing the neighbor to pick mature fruit, the Mosaic law encouraged a sense of mutual solidarity. The local resident was entitled to reap the rewards of land and labor. The land belonged ultimately to God. It was a holy land, set apart by God for his historical purposes. To dwell in the land involved benefits and costs. One of the benefits was open access to free food, however temporary. The staff of life in effect was free. In harvest season, men in Israel would not die of starvation. But their source of sustenance was local: their neighbor's field. Would this have created animosity? Sometimes. Everything in a fallen world is capable of creating animosity. But what about the owner's sense of justice? It was his land, his effort, and his seeds that had made this wealth possible. Why should another man have lawful access to the fruits of his labor?

One possible answer ties this law to the Promised Land. Israel was a holy land that had been set aside by God through a program of partial genocide. (God had specified total genocide,[22] but the Israelites had failed.) The land was exclusively God's. It was His dwelling place. He fed His people on His land. God, not their own efforts, was the source of their wealth (Deut. 8:17).[23] Israel's holy status was still true in Jesus' day because of the temple and its sacrifices. But there is a problem with this explanation: strangers in Jesus' day dwelled in the land, and in fact ruled over the land. Furthermore, Jesus identified the Good Samaritan as a neighbor. The Samaritan therefore would have qualified as a man with lawful access to an Israelite's field. The Promised Land fails as the basis of this case law.

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21. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 11, Conclusion; ch. 17:C; ch. 33:A; Conclusion:C:1.

22. "And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them" (Deut. 7:2).

23. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

A second possible explanation is this: the tribes existed in order to complete God's plan for Israel. Local solidarity was important for maintaining the continuity of the tribes. Problem: this law was still in force in Jesus' day, yet the tribes no longer occupied the land as separate tribal units. The seed laws in this instance seem to have nothing to do with this case law.

Third, it could be argued that Israel was a holy army. An army does not operate in terms of the free market's principle of "high bid wins." In every military conflict in which a city is besieged, martial law replaces market contracts as the basis of feeding the population. The free market's principle of high bid wins is replaced by food rationing. Solidarity during wartime must not be undermined by a loss of morale. A nation's defenders are not all rich. The closer we get to the priestly function of ensuring life, the less applicable market pricing becomes. Problem: Israel was not a holy army after the exile. It was an occupied nation. Yet this case law was still in force. There was no discontinuity in this case between the Mosaic Covenant and the post-exile covenant.

G. The Farmer and the Grocer

The Mosaic law authorized a neighbor to pick grapes or grain from another man's field. It did not authorize a man to pick up a free piece of fruit from a grocer's table. What is the difference? What underlying moral or organizational principle enables us to distinguish between the two acts? In both cases, the "picker" wanted to eat a piece of fruit for free. He was not allowed to do this in the second case.

Let us consider the economic aspects of this law. Both the farmer and the grocer sought a positive return on their investments. The farmer planted seeds in the ground, nurtured the seedlings, and sold the crop to someone, possibly the grocer or his economic agent. The grocer made his money by purchasing a crop in bulk from the farmer or his economic agent, transporting it to a central location, and displaying it in a way pleasing to buyers. What was the differentiating factor? Time? Soil? Location? Money?

The difference seems to have been this: *control over rural land*. The farmer in Mosaic Israel worked the land. He cared for it directly. The grocer did not. The farmer profited directly from the output of this land. The grocer profited indirectly. The farmer had a unique stake in the land itself. The grocer did so only indirectly, insofar as food that was imported from abroad was much more expensive for him to buy,

except in Mediterranean coastal areas and regions close to the borders of the nation. The distinction between grocers and land owners may also have had something to do with the jubilee land laws.[24] Rural land was governed by the jubilee law. Urban real estate was not. Unlike urban land, prior to the exile, rural land was the exclusive property of the heirs of the conquest, though not after the return (Ezek. 47:22–23).[25]

Those who lived on the land and profited from it as farmers were required to share a portion of the land's productivity with others, as we have seen. To this extent, the fruit of the land was the inheritance of those who dwelled close by or who wandered by on a journey when the crop was ripe.[26] In this case, those farmers whose land was located close to highways would have had lower transportation costs but higher sharing costs. It is not hard to imagine that highway properties would have been ideal locations for general stores. Their agricultural produce was not subject to picking. For farmers whose inheritance bordered on highways, setting up a general store would have made good sense. During the feast of firstfruits, they at least could have sold other items, such as wine, to accompany a free handful of grain. They could also have planted only root crops, which were not eligible for picking.

This law would have strengthened the sense of community in a society that was bound by a national covenant that was tied to land. Travel would have been less costly in harvest time. Also, the local poor would have had something to eat in the harvest—a sense of participation in the blessings of God. A brief safety net was in place. To gain access to a full safety net—a lawful bag in which to put the picked produce—the poor had to work as gleaners.[27] While the state was not authorized to send crop collectors into the fields to collect food to redistribute to the poor, the Mosaic civil law did not enforce sanctions against those who came into a field to eat a handful of food. It was not legal for land owners to enforce physical sanctions against those who took advantage of this law. The civil law did not compel wealth redistribution in Mosaic Israel, but it defined the land owner's property

24. As I shall argue below, I do not think this was covenantally relevant: "Has This Law Been Annulled?"

25. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

26. Passover was a pre-harvest feast. Booths (Ingathering/Tabernacles) was post-harvest. So, free produce would rarely have been on the vine or stalk when these two great marches took place. Pentecost was the time of firstfruits (Ex. 23:16). Any farmer who had not yet harvested his crop would have had to share it with travellers to the firstfruits festival.

27. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, chaps. 11, 22.

rights in such a way that the state was prohibited from bringing negative sanctions against those people who picked a handful of the crop.

H. A Shared Environment

Let us consider a difficult application of this case law. Did this law open every man's fields to wandering hordes during a famine? Times of famine have been times of great disruption of the social order. Wandering bands of hungry people fan out across the countryside. Whole populations move from region to region in search of food.[28] This happened repeatedly in Europe from the late medieval era until the late seventeenth century, and well into the twentieth century in Russia.[29] Similar famines have occurred in China in modern times.[30] Before the advent of modern capitalism, famine was a regular occurrence. Even within capitalist society, Ireland suffered a nearly decade-long famine in the 1840s. The absentee landlords in England did not foresee the threat to the potato crop posed by the blight at its first appearance in 1841. Over the next decade, these landlords paid for their lack of foresight with huge capital losses; a million Irish paid with their lives.

Are wandering strangers in search of food the judicial equivalent of a neighbor? Is a desperate family on the road in search of food entitled fill their stomachs with a farmer's corn or apples? If enough of these people were to show up at harvest time, their economic effect would be comparable to a swarm of locusts. Locusts in the Bible are seen as the judgment of God (Ex. 10:4–6; Deut. 28:38). The land owner planted a crop and cared for it in the expectation that his family would eat for another season. Was he now required to sit idly by and watch strangers consume his family's future? Was the state prohibited by this case law from defending his interests? If so, then what would be his incentive to go to the expense of planting and nurturing his next crop? Would he even survive to plant again? Was Israel's society benefitted by opening the fields to all comers in every economic situation? Was the nation's future agricultural output threatened by a definition of "neighbor" that includes an open-ended number of strangers in search of free food?

The goal of this law was the preservation of community. Its context was a local neighborhood in which families share the same en-

28. For historical examples, see Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity* (New York: Dutton, 1942), pp. 107–109.

29. For a list of dozens of these famines, see *ibid*., p. 132.

30. Pearl S. Buck's novel, *The Good Earth* (1931), tells this story.

vironment. A crop failure for one family was probably accompanied by a crop failure for all. They were all in the same boat. Mutual aid and comfort in times of adversity were likely in a community in which every person had a symbolic stake in the community's success. These people shared a common destiny. This law was an aspect of that common destiny.

As for the Samaritan in the parable, he was not on the road for the purpose of stripping fields along the way. The Samaritan assisted the beaten man; he did not eat the last grape on the man's vine. The Samaritan found an injured man on the road. They had both been on a journey. They shared a similar environment. They were both subject to the risks of travel. The threat of robbery threatened all men walking down that road. What had befallen the victim might have befallen the Samaritan. It might yet befall him. Perhaps the same band of robbers was still in the "neighborhood": the road to Jericho.

Men who share a common environment share common risks. When men who share common risks are voluntarily bound by a shared ethical system to help each other in bad times, a kind of social insurance policy goes into effect. Risks are pooled. The costs that would otherwise befall a victim are reduced by men's willingness to defray part of each other's burdens. But, unlike an insurance policy, there is no formal agreement, nor does the victim have any legal claim on the non-victim. The beaten man had no legal claim on the Samaritan, the Levite, or the priest. Two of the three went their way. They broke no civil law, but their act of deliberately passing by on the other side of the road revealed their lack of commitment to the principle of community: shared burdens and blessings.

The ethics of neighborliness is mutual sharing when the resources are available. The ethics of neighborliness did not mandate that the state remain inactive when hordes of men whose only goal is obtaining food sweep down on a rural community. The harvest was shared locally because men have struggled with the same obstacles to produce it. This law assumed a context of mutual obligations, not the asymmetric conditions in a famine, when the producers face an invasion from outside the community by those who did not share in the productive effort.

I. Community and Economy

One of the favorite contrasts of sociologists is community vs. economy. The most famous example of this in sociological literature is

Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), which he wrote at age 32. In this pioneering work, the author contrasted the small, medieval-type village with the modern city. He argued that the demise of the personal relationships of village life has led to the impersonal rationalism and calculation of the modern city.[31] He used the now-familiar metaphors of organic life and mechanical structure to describe these two forms of human association.[32] He viewed the family as the model or ideal type of *Gemeinschaft*.[33] The business firm, which is a voluntary association established for a limited, rational purpose (profit), would seem to serve well as a model for *Gesellschaft*.

In American history, there have been few defenders of *Gemeinschaft*. Thomas Jefferson heralded the independent yeoman farmer, but Jefferson was no advocate of village life. A group of intellectuals and poets known as the Nashville agrarians in 1930 wrote a brief defense of southern agrarian life in contrast to modern urbanism, but they have had no influence and have long been regarded at best as regional utopians, even in the South.[34] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were contemptuous of "the idiocy of rural life,"[35] and most social commentators have agreed with them. Most social commentators have been urban.

The movement of vast populations from the farms to cities has been a continuing phenomenon worldwide, beginning no later than the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century. The advanced division of labor, which was made possible by close contact in urban areas, the transportation revolution, the mechanization of agriculture, the revolution in electrical power, and government-funded road systems and water systems have combined to concentrate populations in vast urban complexes. The modern world is unquestionably an urban civilization.

The Bible promotes both cultures. The farms of Israel were held together as a civilization by the Ark of the Covenant, which was

31. He did not argue, as Marx and other sociologists and economists have argued, that it was the rise of capitalism that undermined the village life. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 78.

32. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community & Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1887] 1957), pp. 33–37.

33. Nisbet, *Sociological Tradition*, p. 75.

34. *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, [1930] 1977). Cf. Alexander Karanikas, *Tillers of a Myth: Southern Agrarians as Social and Literary Critics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

35. Kark Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 6, p. 488.

housed in a city. The New Heaven and New Earth is described as a city in which the tree of life grows (Rev. 22:2). In the Old Covenant, the city was supported by the farms. In the New Covenant's imagery of the final state, the image is different: the city contains the tree. The tree feeds the inhabitants. The symbolism seems to be *from farm to city*. This was also the thrust of the jubilee legislation: ever-smaller farms for an ever-growing population.[36] Yet, covenantally, an heir of the conquest always had his historical roots in the land. The land was his inheritance. His name was associated with the land.

This judicial link to the soil ended with the New Covenant. The land ceased to be a holy place after the fall of Jerusalem. But the imagery of the tree of life, like the imagery of bread and wine, ties members of the New Covenant community to the soil. The preference of suburban Americans for carefully mowed lawns, of Englishmen and Japanese for gardens, of the Swiss and Austrians for flowers growing in window gardens and for vegetable gardens all testify to man's desire to retain his links to the soil from which he came.

There is a story told about the German free market economist Wilhelm Röpke. He was living in Geneva at the time. He invited another free market economist (said by some to be Ludwig von Mises) to his home near Geneva. He kept a vegetable garden plot near his home. The visitor remarked that this was an inefficient way to produce food. He countered that it was an efficient way to produce happiness.[37]

The division of labor is a powerful social arrangement. Specialization increases our economic output as individuals. We can earn more money per hour by specializing than by performing low division of labor tasks. But we also increase our dependence on the social institutions that have promoted the division of labor. Above all, we increase our reliance on banks, transportation systems, and other arrangements run by computers. We have delivered our lives into the hands and minds of computer programmers. The payments system is governed by fractional reserve banking. This is risky. There is an economic case for investing in a lower division of labor lifestyle with a portion of our assets and our time.

There is more to community than efficiency. Community is more

36. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24:G.

37. Russell Kirk says that Röpke said it was Mises. In 1975, I heard the same story from another economist, Röpke's translator, Patrick Boarman. I do not recall that Mises was the target of the remark, but he may have been. See Kirk's 1992 Foreword to Wilhelm Roepke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, [1942] 1992), p. ix.

than property rights. Community in Mosaic Israel was based on a series of covenants. The right of private property was defended by the commandment not to steal, but the definition of theft did not include eating from a neighbor's unharvested, above-ground crop. This exception was unique to rural land. It applied to a form of property that was not part of the free market system of buying and selling. God was uniquely the owner of the land in Mosaic Israel. He set different requirements for ownership of rural land. These rules were designed to provide a brief safety net in an area of the economy in which it was illegal to alienate family property.

In the final analysis, this law was far more symbolic than economic, for the harvest time would not have lasted very long. The sense of community had to be preserved in a system that restricted buying and selling. Those who did not own the best land or even any land at all had a stake in the success of local land owners, despite the law's restrictions of the permanent sale of inherited property. This symbol of participation in the fruits of the land was important for a society whose members celebrated the fulfillment of God's prophecy regarding the inheritance of a Promised Land (Gen. 15:16).[38]

J. Has This Law Been Annulled?

Is there any Mosaic covenantal principle whose annulment also annulled this law? We know that a similar law is still in force. Paul cited the law prohibiting the muzzling of the working ox, applying it to the payment of ministers. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (I Tim. 5:17–18).[39] But this case law applies more generally to the Christian walk: "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (I Cor. 9:9–10).[40] There is a down payment in history—an

38. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

39. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 8.

40. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

earnest—of the covenant-keeper's kingdom victory in eternity. This down payment is an aspect of the inheritance.

> That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:10–14).

The tribal system was annulled in A.D. 70. Was this law exclusively tribal? The same kinds of psychological benefits seem to apply outside the tribal context: commitment to the community, a sense of participation in the blessings of this community, a willingness to defend it against invaders. What is missing today is Mosaic Israel's public exclusion of the names of other gods. A man's presence in the land does not, in and of itself, testify publicly to his willingness to serve under the law of God. The mobility of rival gods is like the mobility of the God of the Bible in the Old Covenant. The universality of their claims makes them different from the gods of the ancient Near East in Moses' day. To this extent, the situation has changed. But religions that claimed allegiance to universal gods appeared in the Near East and Far East at about the time of the Babylonian exile. Nevertheless, people in Israel in Jesus' day were still allowed to pick grain in their neighbors' fields.

This law seems to be a cross-boundary law. The neighbor, defined biblically, has a legal claim to a handful of any crop that he can pick, though not dig up. The biblical hermeneutical principle is that any Old Covenant law not annulled explicitly or implicitly by a New Covenant law is still valid.[41] There seems to be no principle of judicial discontinuity that would annul this law. Because I see no judicial discontinuity between the covenants regarding this law, I conclude that the distinction between the grocer and the farmer was not based on the jubilee law, which has been annulled.

This law applies to rural land during the harvest season but before the harvest takes place. The goal of this law is to increase the sense of

41. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), chaps. 15, 16.

community. All of its members are supposed to know that they have a small stake—a symbolic stake—in the prosperity of the land. There seems to be no discontinuity between the two covenants with regard to this law. It was a theocratic law, but whenever a nation covenants with the Trinitarian God of the Bible, this law is still in force.

The modern world is politically polytheistic.[42] It denies legitimacy to the principle of civil theocracy. It also passes legislation that excludes neighbors from any man's field. It then extends the principle of exclusion to the nation itself. It creates "no trespassing" boundaries around the nation. Access to a man's field is analogous to access to the nation; the modern state is consistent in this regard. Immigration legislation excludes outsiders because they may become a threat to a national covenant that is not confessional. Immigrants may gain the vote and use the state to redistribute wealth. The same kind of exclusivism operates in laws legalizing abortion, which is another barrier to entry into the land.

This law testifies against geographical exclusivism because it is part of a system of covenantal order that is confessionally exclusivist. *Open borders are the rule for biblical theocracy: access to the visible kingdom of God in history*. Here is the logic of "open borders openly arrived at." You may freely walk into a local church; therefore, you may also freely walk into the nation in which that church operates. Any Christian who promotes closed national borders is saying, in effect, "Until some church sends a missionary to your nation, or until your entire population has access to the Internet, you must content yourself with going to hell. Sorry about that."

The message of this law is clear: access to God's promised land is to be accompanied by access to the fields of the promised land at harvest time. This gives non-owners and non-citizens a stake in the maintenance of a biblically theocratic society. This law makes it clear that *private property is not an absolute value in human society*. Private property is an absolute right for God, as the boundary placed around the forbidden tree in Eden reveals; it is not, however, an absolute right for man. *Nothing is an absolute right for man, for man is not absolute*. This case law breaches the boundaries of rural land. Owners are not allowed to use force to exclude a neighbor from picking a handful of the crop to eat in the field. The state may not defend owners' legal title to this token portion of the crop. This means that they have no le-

42. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

gal title to all of it. This is clearly a violation of libertarian definitions of private ownership. The Bible is not a libertarian document, any more than it is socialistic. It is a covenantal document. The neighbor has lawful access to what he can pick, but the state may not lawfully come in with vessels to pick crops in the name of the people (minus 50% for administration).

Conclusion

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees pointed to the sabbath principle as a means of liberating men. The disciples were hungry. Food was nearby. They could lawfully pick grain, but they did not cook it. They had to do some minimal work, but any food preparation activity is work. They were not violating the sabbath. They were walking and talking with the Lord of the sabbath. This was the top priority of the disciples.

The sabbath is not to be used as a means of interfering with recreation that leads to better knowledge of God's work. A stroll on the day of rest is legitimate. So is discussion of spiritual matters. So is food preparation that does not disrupt the day's pattern of rest. Man is not to become enmeshed in a formidable array of rules governing the day of rest. Men are to be liberated by the day of rest. They are not to be placed in such bondage that they cannot enjoy the day. The sabbath is liberation from work and liberation from fear. It is not to be turned a means of subjugation by means of a handbook of man-made restrictions.[43]

43. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 24.

27

THE RICH GET RICHER; SO DO THE POOR

> *And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.*
>
> MATTHEW 13:10–13

The theocentric principleof this passage is God's absolute sovereignty in granting the gift of salvation to those whom He favors, and to remove everything from everyone else. Sovereignty is point one of the biblical covenant.[1] This is not something that covenant-breaking man wants to hear. In fact, it is not something that most covenant-keeping men want to hear. It implies that God is absolutely sovereign in His distribution of the gift of salvation. He sends His people out to preach the gospel, but He clogs the ears of all those listeners whom He eternally opposes.

A. The Kingdom of God

The issue in Matthew is the gospel of the kingdom. Who would receive it? Not those whom God opposed, Jesus said. Who might that have been? The context made it clear: the Jews. Then who was favored by God? Years later, Paul answered: the gentiles. The word of

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

the Lord has come to them, Paul wrote, and they have responded in faith. Not so with Israel. Israel heard, yet she did not hear—exactly as Jesus said. Paul wrote:

> For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people (Rom. 10:11–21).

Paul here cited Isaiah: "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isa. 6:10). So did Jesus in this passage: "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Matt. 13:14–16).

Israel desperately needed salvation. Their ears had grown dull; their heart had waxed gross. Nevertheless, Jesus spoke in parables so that the majority of His listeners would not understand His offer of salvation. He did not seek to sharpen the hearing of all who listened to Him. His words in this passage are inescapably clear: His offer of the gospel was presented in such a way that Israel would *not* hear and respond in faith. Calvinists understand this passage and accept it. Anti-Calvinists prefer not to discuss it, and when commenting on

it, they have great difficulties. They have the same difficulties with Paul's similar words in the Book of Acts:

> And when they [the Jews] had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it (Acts 28:23–28).

B. He Who Has, Gets

The Jews had the law and the prophets. This was something of great value. The gentiles did not. Yet the Jews were about to be passed over by God. The gentiles weren't. This seems to imply that he who has, loses; he who has nothing, gets. "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).[2] Yet this passage states the reverse: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that [which] he hath." How should we understand this?

Consider Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees regarding social outcasts. "And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:11–13). The implication here is that all men are sick unto death. Some men recognize this; others do not. Those who acknowledge that they are sick will seek the services of a physician. Those who do not, won't.

What did Israel possess? Not good spiritual health, surely. What she possessed was *the means of diagnosis*: the law and the prophets,

2. Chapter 24.

which testified to the spiritual sickness of mankind. Jeremiah warned: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Isaiah warned: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities" (Isa. 64:6–7). The Pharisees knew these ancient warnings, but they did not perceive that the warnings applied to them. Israel had the kingdom of God, but it was about to be taken away from them: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

What was the deciding factor in maintaining the kingdom grant? Good fruit. Jesus earlier had said: "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:33–37). He had called for ethical consistency. He had called men to live out their confessions of faith. He wanted them to see exactly what they are from God's point of view. He called for *ethical self-consciousness*.

It is not the mere possession of God's law that can secure salvation. Men must obey it. But they do not obey it. Thus, they are in need of a savior, a kinsman-redeemer. The gentiles recognized this need; the Jews did not. The Jews had known of the coming savior (Isa. 53), but this did them no good. The gentiles had not known, but they would soon recognize Him when His disciples brought word of His redemptive work on their behalf.

What was it that the gentiles possessed? *The knowledge of their own covenantally bankrupt status before God*. This knowledge would soon bring them the kingdom grant: incorporation into the church. What did the Jews lack? This same knowledge. They would soon be disinherited: excluded from this incorporation. He who had nothing, gained; he who had something, lost.

This passage deals prophetically with men's respective positions after the inheritance had been transferred. The kingdom of God would go to the gentiles, Jesus later warned the Pharisees. Then the traditional covenantal system of rewards and curses would prevail: those who have will receive. Those who have nothing will lose even that which they had possessed.

If I have nothing, how can I lose it? This initially makes no sense. But it makes sense within the context of Old Covenant Israel. The Jews had something valuable: the Mosaic law. Paul wrote: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:12–14). To ignore the law's testimony is to risk losing everything, Paul warned. The Mosaic law tells us that we have nothing of value to bring before God. Conclusion: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). James agreed: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). This was the fate of Old Covenant Israel: possessing something valuable, the law of God, Israel had nothing except the law's condemnation. Having nothing, i.e., a having *a false hope in salvation by law*, Israel soon had the kingdom taken away. The gentiles, not having received the Mosaic law, having only the work of the law written on every person's heart (Rom. 2:15),[3] accepted the gospel's message of redemption. The gentiles received something: redemption.

From this point on, the covenantal system of historical sanctions goes into operation: he who has, gets. God's grace pours down visibly on those who have already received the grace of redemption. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).[4] The covenant's blessings reinforce men's faith in the covenant. As a result, they exercise greater faith. The process of linear economic growth begins.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

C. A Thing of Value

We learn in this passage that he who has nothing nevertheless will eventually receive great gain. How can this be? We find the same seeming anomaly in Proverbs. "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches" (Prov. 13:7).[5] The man who attains great tangible wealth, but nothing else, possesses nothing of value in God's eyes. The man who makes himself poor in the world's things for God's sake thereby gains something of great value in God's eyes. He who gives up the pursuit of the world's treasure for the sake of God's eternal treasure has made a wise exchange. He who fills his life with things that deflect him from service to God has made an unwise exchange. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).[6]

The "nothing" that the rich man possesses is the thing that he shall lose: treasure. His tangible wealth has no exchange value in the marketplace of souls. If he loses his soul, he loses his tangible wealth, too. This is how a man with nothing can lose that which he has. He has nothing of value in God's eyes: no marketable capital. God then condemns him to hell because he possesses nothing of eternal value. Eternal life is obtained in this life or not at all. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

But what of the man to whom something of eternal value has been given by God? On the basis of this gift, he will eventually possess greater abundance. More than this: the tangible wealth of the one who has nothing of eternal value is transferred to the man who has received something of eternal value. This wealth transfer is also taught in Proverbs. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[7] The man who seeks great tangible wealth at the cost of God's kingdom may achieve it, but over time, his accumulated wealth will flow to covenant-keepers. The process of spiritual gains and losses is eventually reflected in the realm of economics.

This passage indicates that God's people will inherit the earth in history. The tangible wealth of covenant-breakers will eventually be

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 40.

6. Chapter 35.

7. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

transferred to covenant-keepers. This may be by the conversion of covenant-breakers: God's dispossession of Satan in history.

D. Regression to the Mean

There is an old saying, "The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer." As it applies to things of the spirit, this is an accurate summary. It corresponds to what Jesus taught in this passage. But does it also apply to economics? If it does, then this process somehow overcomes the statistical phenomenon known as regression toward the mean.

Free market economic theory teaches that if an entrepreneur discovers a new way to generate an above-market rate of return, other entrepreneurs will seek to discover his secret. Profitable information is bought and sold and stolen. Over time, new profit-producing techniques spread across the economy. As they do, their rate of return decreases, as more producers adopt the once-secret technique. This is why above-market rates of return tend to disappear. The economist calls this the unhampered free market's *tendency toward equilibrium*. Few concepts are more important than this one in modern economics.

There is an anomaly, however—one that is almost never discussed: the highly unequal distribution of income. My failure to recognize this in Chapter 67 of *Inheritance and Dominion* (1999) was an error. I wrote: "There is a bell-shaped distribution of wealth within a society because of the predictable outcomes of increased temptations that occur on the far ends of capital's spectrum." But there is no bell-shaped curve for either income or wealth. I had not recognized the continuing relevance of Vilfredo Pareto's discovery. This is why in the 2003 revision, I removed this section from the book. I discuss Pareto's law in the revised Chapter 69.[8]

1. Pareto's 20-80 Rule

The Bible's recommended goal is middle-class wealth. Jesus said, "For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always" (John 12:8). This statement appears in three of the Gospels (Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7), but not Luke's. If we will always have the poor with us, then we will always have the rich. The question is: What percentage of rich people will we have? Even more important, how much tangible wealth will the rich control? The answer is, most of it.

8. This following subsection and the one that follows ("Moral Capital") are reprinted from Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), Introduction.

The shape of either a nation's wealth distribution curve or its income distribution curve does not resemble the shape of its population curve. The population curve bulges with the middle class. Both the income distribution curve and the wealth distribution curve bulge with the rich, generation after generation. This does not mean that the same families stay rich. It does mean that the richest 20% of the population own most of the wealth and gain most of the income at any given time. The shape of the income distribution curve resists alteration, generation after generation.

Italian sociologist-economist Vilfredo Pareto in the late nineteenth century made detailed investigations of the distribution of income in Europe. He discovered an amazing fact: the slope of the income curve, from the richest to the poorest members of society, was similar in every nation that he studied. The richest members gained most of the nation's income. This statistical relationship, first published in 1897,[9] has not changed over the last century, irrespective of the economic policies of individual industrial nations. Later studies by other economic historians indicated that in 1835–40, 1883, and 1919 in Great Britain, the top 10% earned 50% of the nation's income.[10] This statistical relationship has come to be known as the Pareto Law or the Pareto Rule, although Pareto did not ascribe a law's degree of predictability to it, at least not in his later work. A 20-80 distribution has been found to apply in social institution after institution, as well as in their diverse operations.[11] No one seems to know why. An economist wrote in 1965: "For a very long time, the Pareto law has lumbered the economic scene like an erratic block on the landscape; an empirical law which nobody can explain."[12]

A 1998 study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards in Ottawa, Canada, reveals that the 20-80 rule still applies quite well in the United States. The top 20% of the population owned 81% of household wealth in 1962, 81.3% in 1983, 83.5% in 1989, 83.7% in 1995, and 84.3% in 1997. For the top 1%, the figures are as follows:

9. Vilfredo Pareto, *Cours d' Econonomie Politique*, vol. 2 (1897), pp. 370–72. The book has still not been translated into English, although it remains famous.

10. D. H. Macgregor, "Pareto's Law," *Economic Journal* (March 1936), pp. 81, 86. Reprinted in Mark Blaug (ed.), *Vilfredo Pareto* (1848–1923) (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1992), pp. 21, 26.

11. Richard Koch, *The 80-20 Principle: How to Achieve More With Less* (Garden City, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1998).

12. Josef Steindl, *Random Processes and the Growth of Firms: A Study of the Pareto Law* (London: Charles Griffin, 1965), p. 18. Cited in *ibid*., p. 3.

1962: 33.4%; 1983: 33.8%; 1989: 37.4%; 1995: 37.6%; 1997: 39.1%.[13] The changes have been in the direction of greater concentration of tangible wealth in the United States.

This seems impossible. Don't middle-class people own their homes? No; they reside in them, but they borrow to buy them. They pay mortgages. The rich are the holders of these mortgages. Title is passed to the home owner, but the asset has a debt against it. Most middle-class people own very little debt-free marketable wealth. They use debt to buy depreciating assets: consumer goods. They do not save. The rich use their money to buy appreciating assets and income-producing assets. They save a much higher percentage of their wealth. When the rich in one nation cease to save at high rates, the rich in another nation will replace them. "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (Deut. 28:43–44).[14]

There is no known way for any industrial society to alter significantly the share of tangible wealth owned by the rich. When political force has been applied in the form of tax policy, the percentages have stayed pretty much the same. It is not even clear that there will be different wealth holders after the new taxation policies are in force, unless the existing wealth owners are deliberately expropriated or executed, as they were in Communist nations. Finally, there is no legitimate biblical justification for using the monopolistic force of civil government to redistribute private wealth in order to achieve greater equality.

The key economic issue regarding wealth distribution is this: the lawful means for gaining control over tangible capital. How do producers gain their share of national wealth in a particular nation? By power, by bribery, by political skills, or by satisfying customer demand? To benefit the largest number of people in society, civil governments should establish legal guarantees to all owners of property. This will encourage the self-interested rich to continue to use their wealth for customer-satisfying purposes. The rich should continue to save, invest, and provide tools for their employees. The legal protection of all people's right to own and use property will also encourage the bottom 80% to do the same. Through competition to

13. John Schmitt, Lawrence Mishel, and Jared Bernstein, paper prepared for a panel on "Economic Well-being in North America," Canadian Economic Association Meetings, May 31, 1998, Table 7.

14. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

satisfy customers, members in lower-income groups will replace those in the higher-income groups. The percentage of tangible capital in each quintile will not change very much, but the amount of wealth produced by this capital will increase dramatically over time, as the compound growth process takes over.

Capital accumulation by the rich is the most important measurable source of a capitalist society's increasing tangible wealth. The rich provide the money that buys the tools that raise the wealth of the other classes. But tools are not enough to make a society rich among nations. A society's other classes must possess *moral capital*, such as the willingness to work hard, future-orientation, honesty, and a good reputation. Moral capital is intangible, but it is nonetheless real. It produces income for its owners.

Pareto's anomaly is a real one. If 10% of the population receives half of the national income, or if 20% of the population receives 70 or 80%, and this continues generation after generation in nation after nation, where is the evidence of equilibrium? Why shouldn't the distribution curves of both income and wealth be more continuous? Why should they be permanently skewed to the right? If there is open entry into the capital markets for the bottom 80% of the population, why shouldn't wealth be more evenly distributed? Is there some psychological barrier to entry, such as a widespread fear of losing investment capital or the fear of becoming self-employed, that keeps the distribution curves skewed?

There is continuous movement into and out of the top 20%. The story of rags to riches to rags in three generations is a familiar one. Some very wealthy families do seem to maintain their presence over several generations. This may be due to political favoritism, i.e., restrictions on competition. It is hard to say. Detailed academic studies of permanent intergenerational wealth at the top are not common.[15] But there appears to be considerable mobility into and out of the top quintile for most of its members. But there is not mobility of the distribution curve itself.

2. Moral Capital

If we consider moral capital as income-producing capital, then the Pareto rule does not apply. There is only so much moral capital that

15. In the United States, Ferdinand Lundberg wrote several books on this topic, but he was always considered a maverick historian by academic historians. His books are not cited by historians very often, especially *The Rich and the Super-Rich: Who Really Owns America? How Do They Keep Their Wealth and Their Power?* (New York: Lyle Stewart, 1968).

any person can possess. The rich cannot amass moral capital in the way they can amass tangible capital. If the members of all economic classes in a society were to have approximately the same moral standards and degree of adherence to them, then the shape of the curve of society's moral capital would match the shape of the population curve.

Let me clarify my argument by an example. Assume that in nation A, only the rich are literate. This means that the national rate of illiteracy is 80%. In nation B, there is almost universal literacy. Without knowing anything else about the tangible wealth of either nation, which one would you guess has the richest rich people? I am speaking only of the top 20% of the population. I would guess nation B. But what if I am wrong? What if nation A is richer, perhaps because it is a small, oligarchical, oil-exporting nation? Which group of rich people do you think will be richer in a century if the literacy rates stay the same in both nations, assuming that the rich in both nations do not send their investment capital outside their respective countries? I would still guess nation B. This has nothing to do with investment decisions made by the rich. It has everything to do with the determination of the less rich to learn how to read—a determination based on their moral capital. A rising tide of literacy raises all economic ships: poor, middle class, and rich. I argue that this same principle of national wealth formation applies to moral capital in general.

Without widely distributed moral capital, today's rich people could not retain the market investment capital for long. Competent and honest employees would value of their become increasingly scarce and costly, thereby lowering the value of investment capital. Voters would become envy-driven. They would elect politicians who would seek to confiscate the wealth of the rich in the name of the poor on behalf of middle-class voters (minus 50% for government handling). Per capita productivity would slow, stagnate, or fall. So would the nation's wealth. The shape of the wealth distribution curve would remain the same—heavily concentrated in the top 20%—but the growth of wealth in this society would slow down or even decline.

E. To Inherit the Earth

The Bible teaches that covenant-keepers will inherit the earth.[16] If the covenant-breaking rich continue to own most of the wealth, how can covenant-keepers inherit the earth? Or are we to believe that this

16. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

inheritance is post-historical? The Old Covenant texts that forecast this inheritance do not indicate that the inheritance is post-historical.

> His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).
>
> For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).
>
> But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).
>
> For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).[17]

How can Christians inherit the earth if the rich own most of it, and Christians are told not to seek riches? The answer: postmillennialism.[18] God's kingdom will be extended by widespread religious conversion. The vast majority of people in all income groups will be brought to saving faith. Even the rich minority will be converted. If they aren't, then they will be replaced by Christians who become wealthy through serving customers more efficiently. Inheritance of the earth will be by conversion, not by a minority of Christians buying up the assets of the world. Redemption is spiritual, not financial.

F. The Spread of the Gospel

The key factor in contributing to the permanent wealth of nations is saving grace. Special grace is fundamental. Contrary to free-market economic theory, private property is a secondary issue, for it is an outworking of God's common grace. Without special grace to some members of society, common grace cannot be sustained indefinitely.[19] The nation will eventually adopt capital-reducing measures based on envy or the desire to preserve the existing distribution of wealth. The statistical law of large numbers operates in nations.

If Pareto's rule applies internationally, as it seems to today,[20] then there will continue to be inequality, but the same minority of nations will not retain the advantage over the others. The international wealth

17. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 40.

18. Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillenial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997).

19. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6.

20. Eighty percent of the world's wealth is owned by 25 percent of the world's population. Koch, *80/20 Principle*, p. 22.

distribution curve will continue to be skewed to the right, but those nations inside the top quintile will change. The key issue is this: On what basis does a nation enter the top fifth? By covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking? In either case, no nation is likely to stay on top permanently. Either negative sanctions will come against covenant-breaking nations, or else other covenant-keeping nations will be blessed even more by God. But in the second instance, every covenant-keeping nation will get richer, as will rich and poor residents in all of them.

Jesus said, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt. 12:33). The evil tree is eventually cut down: "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:17–20).[21]

So, the spread of the gospel produces positive economic effects. God rewards covenantal faithfulness with prosperity (Deut. 8:18).[22] This prosperity is not to become a snare: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).[23] If it does snare the unrighteous society, then the "nothing" which it has—its wealth—will be removed from it.

The long-term movement of the kingdom of God is from poverty to wealth. To sustain their wealth and expand it, covenant-keepers must sustain their confession and their obedience to God's law. The mark of their commitment is their willingness to spend a portion of their wealth to take the good news of salvation and wealth to others. They must share their tangible capital with others, but more important, share the covenantal basis of their tangible capital: their moral capital. They must seek to take the gospel to those who suffer poverty because of their rebellion to God. *Covenant-keepers are to use their economic capital to capitalize the poor in spirit*. If those who have received wealth from God on the basis of their confession and obedience are successful in their efforts to share the wealth, the poor will get richer, and so will the rich. *Increasing productivity for all is produced when the productivity of the poor increases*. The increase in capital will increase the division of labor.

21. Chapter 18.
22. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.
23. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

G. Unequal Distribution of Wealth

The nagging question does not go away: What about income inequality? In every modern society that economists have investigated, there is huge inequality. Twenty percent of the population owns most of the tangible wealth. Even after almost a century of steeply graduated income taxes and graduated inheritance taxes, steep inequality persists.

Pareto did not explain the existence of income inequality. In the century since he published his findings, no economist has come up with anything approaching a widely accepted explanation. We do not know why this inequality continues to exist in the face of both free market competition and socialist taxation.

The disparity in income and wealth may have something to do with disparities in future-orientation. Most people are not highly future-oriented. They are not willing to save money at low rates of interest. They prefer to borrow. They go into debt in order to buy consumer goods that depreciate. They do not get on the growth side of compound interest.

The disparity in income and wealth could be the result of inherent productivity of innovation. We might argue that successful new production methods produce enormous wealth for their early discoverers, who retain their wealth until innovative competitors find replacement methods. This explanation relies on a concept of economic growth that is overwhelmingly based on entrepreneurial skills rather than on moral capital. Surely, Christians' moral capital has not elevated them into the top 20% of wealth holders over the last century.

The entrepreneur bears a heavy load of uncertainty. Most people prefer to avoid this. They prefer predictable wages to market risks and uncertainty. They are willing to accept less income in order to avoid the loss of both capital and income. Those few entrepreneurs who survive free market competition become rich. Thus, the rich are always a minority.

An entrepreneurship-based explanation of income inequality reinforces the idea that Christians' inheritance of the earth will take place as a result of widespread conversions, not by any uniquely confession-based advantages possessed by Christians. Moral capital sustains the social order that allows entrepreneurship to produce wealth for all, but mainly for those who possess the skills. Moral capital does not make a majority of people wealthy. It does not even make Christians wealthy in comparison to successful entrepreneurs. But it makes all men richer over time. It makes sustained economic growth possible.

Few people believe this today. Almost no economist believes it. Economists believe that the free market social order is self-reinforcing and expansionist, irrespective of God, Christianity, or supernaturalism generally. They believe that the economic fruits of capitalism will persuade voters of the truth of its roots, and the roots are found in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: private property and personal self-interest. God's covenant has nothing to do with it.[24]

Conclusion

The rich will get richer if their tangible wealth rests on their covenantal faithfulness, i.e., their moral capital. The expansion of covenantal wealth is based on the process of *obedience-abundance-greater obedience, greater abundance* (Deut. 8:18). This is a system of positive feedback. But if the tangible wealth of the rich is based on their faith in their own autonomy, they will eventually get poorer. Positive feedback reverses (Deut. 8:19–20).[25]

Richard Koch, who has written a book on profitable applications of Pareto's rule, thinks that positive feedback is the key to understanding why the 20-80 phenomenon exists. "In the absence of feedback loops, the natural distribution of phenomena would be 50/50—inputs of a given frequency would lead to commensurate results. It is only because of positive feedback and negative feedback loops that causes do not have equal results. Yet it also seems to be true that powerful positive feedback loops only affect a small minority of the inputs. This helps explain why those small minority of inputs can exert so much influence."[26]

Do the poor get poorer? Yes, if their poverty is spiritual. No, if their poverty is the result of their open hands to others. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. . . . But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack" (II Cor. 8:9, 14–15).[27]

24. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

25. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

26. Koch, *80/20 Principle*, p. 15.

27. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 5.

One goal of the gospel is to make all men rich spiritually. But, in achieving this, the gospel necessarily must make men tangibly richer. The covenant's upward movement of confession-obedience-wealth will spread the blessings of both tangible and spiritual wealth to more people. But it will not spread tangible wealth evenly, according to Pareto.

The top priority in this passage is to gain the abundance that comes to him who has something. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." This possession is redemption. He who has nothing—no redemption—will lose even the wealth that he has. This threat points to final judgment.

This process of spiritual development—positive feedback—is reflected in the realm of economics. There is a means by which the rich get richer, long term. They get richer under free market capitalism by enabling the poor to get richer. They invest capital, which provides the tools that increase the productivity of workers. The rich increase their incomes when the poor increase their incomes. Economic theory teaches that the rich do not get rich by exploiting the poor. On the contrary, they get rich by extending to others their knowledge of way to long-term wealth, i.e., compound economic growth. To sustain this process long term requires an open, merciful hand.[28]

28. Chapter 10.

28

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

MATTHEW 13:18–23

The theocentric principle undergirding this passage is not immediately apparent. We are told that the fruitfulness of the soil determines the result of the sowing. The seed-sower—God—distributes the same seeds, but the results are different. This passage seems to minimize the work of the sower. But verse 22 provides a clue: "the deceitfulness of riches." The same Greek root word for deceitfulness is found in another passage that deals with Satan's work of deception. "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all **deceivableness** of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong de-

lusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thess. 2:7–12). *God sends a strong delusion on those whom He hates in order that they might believe a lie*. It is the same with the soils. God is sovereign in salvation, both as seed-sower and soil-maker. This is an aspect of God's sovereignty: point one of the biblical covenant.[1] But this sovereignty is manifested in a specific area: evaluation, meaning imputation. This is point four: judgment.[2]

A. Wealth and Autonomy

This passage is an explanation of the previous passage:

> And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold (Matt. 13:3–8).

Riches are here compared with thorns. The cares of this world and riches overwhelm a man's faith in the word of God. This points back to the curse on Adam: "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field" (Gen. 3:18). The thorns are hindrances that thwart man's work. The work in question in the parable is the work of extending the kingdom of God in history. The measure of earthly success is wealth, yet wealth is what threatens the hearer's work. The cares of the world undermine his kingdom efforts. One such care is the amassing and care of riches. Great wealth requires great care to maintain it.

Riches are said to deceive men. What is it about riches that deceives men? Moses made this clear: *the sin of autonomy*. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).[3] The author of Proverbs wrote: "The rich

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

2. Sutton, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed.(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).[4] "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8–9).[5]

What is it about wealth that persuades men that they are autonomous? One aspect is the great *range of alternatives* open to men with wealth. In fact, wealth is best described in terms of this range of alternatives. We say that a person's wealth has increased in direct proportion to the increase over his previous range of choices. The man of great wealth is tempted to trust in his wealth because it seems to endow him with him a Godlike power of decision-making. This is a delusion. The range of choices open to any man is minuscule compared to what God can do. God is infinite; He can do whatever He chooses. The rich man is blinded by his wealth because it is his preferred means of comparison with other men, not with God.

Another aspect is the *seeming impersonalism* of wealth. Wealth is a tool of dominion. Tools appear to be impersonal. They are not, but they appear to be. Wealth extends a man's power and influence over others in a seemingly impersonal way. A tool is usually regarded as impersonal device that extends the personal decisions of its owner. *Wealth is seen as existing independently, or only as an extension of the owner*. This is a delusion. Wealth does not exist independent of the decisions of other men. Other men impute value to the rich man's capital or to the services that he sells that provide him with his wealth. If their opinions change, he can be reduced to poverty. The familiar example of the buggy whip industry is correct. When the automobile came, the buggy whip business was doomed, except among the Amish.

Men seek those forms of wealth that insulate them from the changing opinions of other men. They accumulate money because money is more constant in value than the opinions of their customers. It is the most marketable commodity. We are now back to the issue of the wide range of choice. But when an invading army comes, or plague comes, or famine comes, or some other disaster comes, money is of little or no value. The environment that made wealth what it was has changed.

To attribute to any aspect of the creation a power associated with God is to move from theonomy to autonomy. Men are tempted to

4. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

5. *Ibid*., ch. 85.

attribute to wealth or power this kind of autonomy. But most men recognize the inherent danger of power. It calls forth others who wish to claim such power by whatever means. Power is too personal to be shared easily; it must either be monopolized or surrendered.[6] But wealth can be gained in many ways. Others can become wealthy without threatening the status of the wealthy man.[7] So, wealth is the more common means adopted in the quest for autonomy.

B. Riches vs. Fruitfulness

The deceitfulness of riches leads to unfruitfulness. This is because men are tempted to focus on the temporal. Riches are a convenient means of assessing productivity. Because of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:27–28),[8] men are inescapably confronted with the results of their own productivity in the task of subduing the earth. They seek to discover *agreed-upon success indicators* that will reveal their degree of success. In almost every society, money has been the most familiar success indicator, the one open to the widest audience. Unlike beauty or power or artistic creativity, wealth is open to a wide range of talents. In this sense, it is a more impersonal success indicator.

Because so many people acknowledge wealth as a measure of success, men are lured into pursuing it. Other men impute value to wealth as the measure of a man's life. It is easy to listen to the crowd and to evaluate one's own performance in relation to the economic success of others.

This is a snare and a delusion, Jesus taught. The crowd is wrong. What constitutes riches is right standing with God. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus

6. In bureaucracy, power is divided up more finely and made less dependent on anyone's personal attributes. Bureaucratic power can be allocated widely. But it is circumscribed by rules. Bureaucracy is the common man's way to power.

7. If many people become wealthy, this can threaten his status. Some goods are *positional goods*. They are valuable only because they are in short supply. If mass production makes them widely available, they lose their status-giving power. Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), ch. 3. This is one reason why free market capitalism is hated by members of groups that have attained their social status in a pre-capitalistic economy, where wealth is not widely shared.

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 4.

beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:23–26).[9]

Then what is fruitfulness? "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23). Money does not buy these or empower these. The deceitfulness of wealth wars against these. Wealth is not inherently opposed to them, but the deceitfulness associated with it does undermine such fruitfulness.

The success indicators of spiritual maturity are not quantifiable. Wealth is. The lack of a quantifiable success indicator bothers most men. They want to "keep score" in life. They seek a numerical indicator. "He who dies with the most toys, wins" proclaims a popular American tee-shirt.

Did Jesus warn men not to use wealth as their success indicator, except perhaps as a negative indicator? If He did, then He broke with the Mosaic law's covenantal principle of inheritance. There is no doubt that wealth was a legitimate success indicator under the Mosaic law. "The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 28:8).[10] Wealth was a success indicator even before the Mosaic law. "And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. 13:2). The loss of wealth was seen as a curse. "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways" (Hag. 1:6–7).[11] Consider your ways, God told them. The disparity between their input (sown much) and their output (bring in little) was a lack-of-success indicator. It was to motivate them to spiritual introspection. There was a positive relationship between covenantal faithfulness and economic success. Did Jesus deny this relationship? If He did, then the New Covenant represents a sharp discontinuity with the Old Covenant, for the visible sanctions have changed.

9. Chapter 38.

10. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

11. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 32.

C. Exchange Rate: Temporal Wealth vs. Eternal Wealth

The text does not say that riches lead men astray; their deception does. Man is easily deceived by riches, as we have seen. Riches are temporal; so, they focus man's attention on the temporal. The *time-bound nature of riches* is a snare and a delusion. Jesus kept teaching about the exchange rate between temporal wealth and eternal wealth. He kept saying that the rate of exchange is low, but men—especially rich men—think it is high. Why lay up treasure on earth, Jesus asked, where thieves break in? Is this not foolish? But the rich man cannot see the foolishness. Why? Because he refuses to see that *he is as temporal as his wealth*. They both dissipate—he more certainly than his wealth. But he turns a blind eye to his mortality. Even an old man thinks he has at least five years left to live.

1. Declining Marginal Utility

Economics teaches that as a person accumulates units of one asset, each additional unit is worth less to him than the previous unit. This is the law of decreasing marginal utility. It leads to the statement, "enough is enough." So, a rich man should be progressively willing to surrender ownership of a unit of this asset to gain a unit of an asset that he does not own: eternal wealth. But there is an assumption behind the law of diminishing marginal utility: the person's tastes do not change. If there is an addictive aspect of the item, then the law of diminishing marginal utility applies differently. The enjoyment produced by each unit declines, as economic theory says it must, but demand nevertheless increases. To get the same thrill as before, the user must consume more of the drug per dose. To avoid painful withdrawal symptoms, the addict must consume more doses per unit of time. More and more units of the drug are demanded by the addict. Jesus' description of the deceitfulness of riches and the inability of the rich man to enter heaven implies that *temporal wealth is addictive*.

If temporal wealth were not addictive, then, in the eyes of a rich man, the exchange rate between temporal wealth and eternal wealth would shift in favor of eternal wealth. As a man accumulates more temporal wealth, he should find the value of each additional unit worth less to him. Eternal wealth would look more appealing to him. He would be willing to exchange some of his earthly wealth for a greater supply of eternal wealth. But this is rarely the case, Jesus taught. This points to earthly wealth as addictive.

Yet the same can be true of the accumulation of eternal wealth. It,

too, can become addictive, but not for many people. Still, the idea has had a fascination for Americans. In 1933, in the worst economic phase of the Great Depression, a 1929 novel by Rev. Lloyd C. Douglas, became a best-seller: *Magnificent Obsession*. The title reveals the theme: giving away wealth for God's kingdom becomes an obsession. As a few men learn this lifelong discipline, they prosper. The book was made into a popular movie in 1935 and again in 1954.[12] But most people find the suggestion hard to implement, especially rich men.

2. Radical Change

There is another explanation for the rich man's resistance: the non-marginal nature of the exchange. Eternal life is not sold for temporal wealth, unit by unit. It is given away as a package deal through special grace: *definitive sanctification*. This package is supposed to be filled over time by *progressive sanctification*.[13] Marginal exchange is the meaning of this verse: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:20).[14] Laying up treasures is not a one-time event. It is *a lifetime process of exchange*, unit by unit, good work by good work. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10). These exchanges begin only after legal access to the eternal treasury is transferred to the recipient.

Prior to receiving grace, the poor man is more likely than the rich man to think, "If this life is all there is, then I will consider eternal life." The rich man thinks, "This life is good for me. I cannot be sure about eternal life. If I must sacrifice this life for that life, I shall stick with what I know and have come to depend on." *Riches focus a rich man's attention and hope on the temporal, where he is successful.* He will

12. Douglas was a theological liberal. He was the minister of the large and influential First Congregational Church of Los Angeles in the late 1920s. He wrote the book in an emotional depression, when the church's leaders were discussing his dismissal. He resigned, finished the book, then wrote a dozen more, several of which became best-sellers and movies. His most famous novel was *The Robe* (1942), which became the first movie in Cinemascope (1953), the wide-screen technology.

13. John Murray, "Sanctification," *Collected writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Trust, 1977), II, p. 277. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:A:2.

14. Chapter 13.

not readily believe that portions of his temporal wealth can be exchanged for eternal wealth. If he does believe this prior to special grace, he is deceived once again: works religion. He cannot open an account at heaven's treasury on his own signature. Regeneration is the radical change that must precede the exchange process.

The price of radical change is lower for the poor man. He is not giving up much. *The price of radical change is higher for the rich man. He surrenders much: his would-be autonomy*. Radical decisions are rare. Most decisions are made at the margin: surrendering a little of this to get a little of that.

Jesus indicates here that the required change is radical: surrendering faith in this world's ability to offer eternal bliss. You cannot buy your way into eternal life. So, it is not that the rich man is asked to give up his wealth that alienates him. He is asked only to tithe, just as the poor man is asked. But he *is* asked to surrender faith in his riches as a gateway to eternity. This is the great stumbling block of the gospel for the rich man: *he cannot buy his way in*. It is not much a stumbling block to the poor man, unless he is poor because of some addictive sin. The rich man is asked to see his riches as God's gift, which God may remove at any time, just as He removed Job's wealth. Job proclaimed, in the midst of his new-found poverty, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). The rich man is asked to proclaim this testimony in the midst of his treasure. Few do. They trust in their treasure.

Men generally see their success as well-deserved.[15] They see any set-backs as deviations from justice. The poor man who comes to grips emotionally with his poverty can look forward to a better world after death. He is told by God that his poverty is part of God's plan for him in this world. His poverty is no longer a curse or an injustice; it is merely an environment—even a predestined environment. He can mentally surrender faith in this world. But the rich man will not readily see his wealth as merely as a God-imposed environment. He sees his wealth as his legitimate reward for his own meritorious behavior, or at least his shrewd behavior. He is asked by God to turn loose of his positive, autonomous self-image, which is the product of the deceitfulness of riches. He refuses. His wealth reinforces—validates—his positive self-image. The gospel unquestionably removes this validation. He sees his wealth as a kingdom-building tool for his

15. When they do not, they may be eaten up with guilt.

little kingdom. God says that his wealth is a kingdom-building tool for God's kingdom. The rich man sees his wealth as his tool. God says that both he and his wealth are God's tools. For a believer in autonomy, this is a bitter pill.

D. Inheritance

The issue of wealth is the issue of inheritance. Jesus told a parable of a rich man who dreamed of building new barns. "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16–21).[16] His dream of new barns was legitimate. Grain must be stored. What was illegitimate was his thought that the barns would be his. He did not recognize his own mortality. He did not think about inheritance. He did not ask himself the question: "Whose shall those assets be?"

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Those who are meek before God will inherit.1[17] The rich man is deceived into believing that the might of his hand has gotten him his wealth. This was as true under the Mosaic Covenant as under the New Covenant. Jesus warned them that the success indicator of expanding wealth is not a legitimate substitute for being rich toward God.

But how can a person be rich toward God? Through worship. This was Haggai's warning to Israel. They had not built God's house of worship. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the

16. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

17. Chapter 4.

land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands" (Hag. 1:8–11).[18]

The open purse will be filled. The closed purse will be emptied. The open purse is open at the top, where its owner can reach in and pull out money to give at his discretion. The closed purse has a hole in the bottom. Its owner has no discretion as to what happens to the contents. *The authority of a man over a full purse is based on his submission to God*. This was as true in Haggai's day as in Christ's.

The inheritance that Christ spoke of is the whole earth. What greater accumulation of wealth could there be? It is accumulated by His people. How? By their wisdom, faithfulness, and generosity. By their efficiency, too. *Honest wealth is the result of serving others, namely, customers*. He who does not waste resources can serve customers better. Over time, this wealth builds up as His people extend the kingdom of God in history. This is the fulfillment of the dominion covenant.

Christ was warning His followers not to make the same mistake that those of Haggai's generation made: *the mistake of the tight purse*. We are to be rich toward God. This is the basis of wealth accumulation under the New Covenant, just as it was under the Old. There is no discontinuity. The sanctions are the same. The law is the same. The sin is the same: autonomy.

Conclusion

The deceitfulness of riches chokes the word. What word? The word of God. The passage in Mark adds lusts. "And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). The lusts that riches can temporarily fulfill blind men to the word of God.

The top priority here is to deal with riches in such a way as to avoid the great deception: autonomy. This was what Moses warned Israel; this is what Jesus also warned Israel. This warning is universal. Riches are either a covenantal blessing or a prelude to a covenantal curse. The man who dreamed of building barns was under a curse. He was a fool. He was building them for himself. He forgot about his own mortality. Mortals cannot enjoy the experience of wealth accumulation indefinitely. Either their time runs out or their wealth does.

18. North, *Restoration and Dominion*, ch. 32.

Jesus warned every rich man of the deception of riches. Riches seem to validate the rich man's presumption of immortality and autonomy. The rich man's wealth makes him feel autonomous and therefore divine. But men die, unlike God. The man with the barn-building plans forgot this.

To be rich with God is not to dissipate one's wealth. It is to sew up the hole in the bottom of one's purse. Accounts receivable continue to exceed accounts paid. To be rich with God is also to accumulate wealth in the world beyond the grave. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).[19] This investment program restores the lost continuity that individual mortality imposes. We inherit beyond the grave. By giving up the lust for autonomy in history, we can become our own heirs in eternity. We leave an inheritance behind, yet we immediately collect it in heaven. We can have our cake and eat it, too. He who succumbs to the deceitfulness of riches either consumes his cake before he dies or leaves it behind for others to enjoy. In either case, he is left without cake.

Men trust in wealth. The questions are these:

In what does permanent wealth consist?

Where is it accumulated?

When is it accumulated?

How is it accumulated?

When is it inherited?

Where is it inherited?

The content of a person's faith—his trust—is revealed by his answers to these questions.

19. Chapter 13.

29

CONTINUITY AND CIVILIZATION

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

MATTHEW 13:24–30

The theocentric focus here is God's final judgment: sanctions.[1] In this passage, Jesus says that there will be no great discontinuous event that will precede this final judgment. The wheat and the tares will grow together in the same field until the reapers come to cut down the tares and destroy them.

A. Rival Kingdoms

The disciples were not sure what this parable meant. Jesus told them in private. "Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:36–43).

First, this parable is about history and its consummation. The son of man sows the wheat: Jesus Christ. The field is the world. This is the arena of history. So, the parable concerns the development of history. This development is a contest between two kingdoms. The children of God constitute one kingdom; the children of Satan constitute the other.

Second, the two kingdoms develop in the field without any discontinuous event. The reapers do not enter the field until the wheat and the tares have fully developed. Each kingdom has extended its principles into the world. Each has sought to fill the field.

Third, the contest between the two kingdoms culminates in the final judgment: "The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world." The great discontinuity is the final judgment. In it, the tares are removed from history; the wheat remains.

Fourth, neither kingdom establishes itself monopolistically in history. The tares remain; so does the wheat. History is the working out of the two kingdoms.

B. Eschatology and Development

The wheat and the tares develop over time. Neither can legitimately expect complete victory over the other. The contest will go on until the end of time. Each side strives to fill the field. Development is a feature of both sides.

As each side develops, it reduces the influence of the other. This parable does not indicate which side becomes dominant in history. It does indicate that there is no discontinuous event that will intervene to stop the development of either side. Neither side is cut off in the midst of time. Neither side sees its efforts completely reversed. Wheat

and tares can hope for the future. The tares have no legitimate eternal hope, but they have legitimate earthly hope. They will never see their influence wholly suppressed in history.

1. Premillennialism

The premillennialist avoids dealing with this passage whenever possible. The premillennial interpretation of history rests on a view of the future that will contain a great discontinuity a thousand years prior to the final judgment. Historic premillennialists say that there will be a great tribulation period ahead for the church. After this period of persecution, Jesus will return bodily to set up His kingdom on earth. These expositors are post-tribulationists. There are very few historic premillennialists still writing. Pretribulation dispensational premillennialists say that Jesus will remove his church from history for seven years, or possibly three and a half years, during which the great tribulation will come on national Israel. Then Jesus, His church, the resurrected dead, and angels will return to set up a millennial kingdom.[2]

In both interpretations, the prior work of the kingdom is cut off in history, either by the Great Tribulation or the church's Rapture, which precedes the tribulation of national Israel. That is, whatever success the church has achieved culturally will be reversed. The world will become dominated by covenant-breakers. They will overcome the kingdom of God. It will take a cosmic discontinuity—the bodily return of Jesus—to overcome this great reversal.

This means that the investment, sacrifice, and commitment of Christians throughout history will not culminate in cultural dominance. Their efforts will be reversed in a great discontinuity: the Great Tribulation. Rather than compound growth's leading to cultural dominance, we are assured that virtually all of the church's work in history will come to ruin. Without the direct intervention of Jesus

2. The possibility of mixing resurrected saints and fallen humanity during the coming millennium has not been taken seriously by professionally trained dispensational theologians (e.g., John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost), but popularizers of the dispensational position (e.g., Dave Hunt, an accountant) have asserted that this will take place. See John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1979), p. 86; J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Relation between Living and Resurrected Saints in The Millennium," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 117 (Oct. 1960), pp. 337, 341. Hunt offers his contrary opinion: "After the Antichrist's kingdom has ended in doom, Jesus will reign over this earth at last. Which of these kingdoms we will be in depends upon the choice we make now—for God's truth or for the Lie." Dave Hunt, *Peace Prosperity and the Coming Holocaust* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1983), p. 263.

and His angels, the work of the church cannot produce cultural victory. There will be little or no trace of Christian institutions after the Great Tribulation. Covenant-breakers will make a clean sweep of history. Only Christ's overcoming of the process of history will restore Christian civilization. This implication is so horribly pessimistic that premillennialists rarely put it into print, but it is an inescapable conclusion of their system of interpretation.

2. Amillennialism

In contrast to the premillennialist, the amillennialist affirms continuity. He also affirms the progressive defeat of the church and Christian civilization (if any). Evil remains dominant in history. Some amillennialists place the Great Tribulation ahead of us. Premillennialism's pessimism regarding the pre-Second Coming church is also characteristic of the amillennial system of interpretation. What will save the church and Christians is the cosmic discontinuity of final judgment. Amillennialism teaches either a continuity of stalemate or a continuity of cultural surrender as the last day approaches.

Any suggestion that Christians should expect to see their efforts produce a transformed society is rejected by amillennialists as either naive or actually heretical. There supposedly can be no Christian civilization in history, and all attempts to build one is a manifestation of "triumphalism" or worse, "Constantinianism." Christian civilization is dismissed as a chimera and a false ideal that will always produce tyranny in the name of Christ. Amillennialists defend the idea of a religiously neutral civilization or even a covenant-breaking civilization as a preferred alternative to Constantinianism. Better to have tyranny in man's name than tyranny in God's name, they say. Their view of history predicts the universal rule of one or another form of tyranny. The preaching of the gospel can at best ameliorate this tyranny by creating pockets of righteousness: Christian ghettos. Yet even this protection will be lost during the Great Tribulation.[3]

3. Postmillennialism

The postmillennialist argues that there will be a time of kingdom success and blessings prior to the final judgment. The kingdom of God

3. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 76–92. Cf. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), pp. 22–36; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1992] 1997), Appendix A.

will extend its influence across the earth. Rival kingdoms will be in minority opposition to the dominant culture, which will be Christian.

This means that Christians' efforts today to extend God's kingdom will produce permanent fruit in history. The eschatological continuity of history is a continuity of victory for God through His people. The dominion covenant will be progressively fulfilled in history. So will the Great Commission.[4]

The compounding process operates to the advantage of Christianity. Compound growth over time means that righteousness increases its dominance in history. Low rates of growth produce very large results if they are not interrupted or reversed. This means that a small investment today that compounds at a low rate will produce huge returns in the distant future. The inheritance of the righteous will grow. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:9). "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. 37:11).

C. Continuity and Risk

This promise of historic continuity lowers the risk of present investments for the person who looks beyond his own death. His heirs will reap the fruit of today's investment in the kingdom of God. By lowering the risk of a great reversal, Jesus' promise of continuity raises the reward to those who are future-oriented, i.e., those who have the kingdom of God as their goal rather than their own wealth.

The covenant-keeper who looks into the future and sees success for the kingdom of God rejoices. He defines himself by Christ's name. He claims the future victory of Christ's kingdom as his own. By identifying himself with the kingdom, he appropriates for himself its success or failure in history. The pessimillennialist announces the kingdom's cultural failure apart from an eschatological discontinuity. But if only a discontinuity can bring cultural victory to Christ's kingdom, then the return on any present investment in the kingdom will be culturally negative in the final analysis. The final victory of Christ's kingdom will have nothing to do with any investment made today. The risk of negative returns on today's cultural investments is total.

This pessimillennial assessment of risk redirects Christian investment into narrowly defined activities, such as personal evangelism, church building projects, and defensive efforts to preserve a minimal

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

degree of freedom from state interference. Because all efforts more comprehensive that these are said to be eschatologically doomed to failure, it is seen as a waste of scarce resources to attempt anything else. "You don't polish brass on a sinking ship," announced dispensational preacher J. Vernon McGee in the 1950's. Peter Lalonde, McGee's spiritual heir, says of the theonomic postmillennialist: "It's a question, 'Do you polish brass on a sinking ship?' And if they're working on setting up new institutions, instead of going out and winning the lost for Christ, then they're wasting the most valuable time on the planet earth right now, and that is the serious problem in his thinking."[5] His is the theology of the rescue mission, not Christian civilization.[6]

The eschatological continuity described in Matthew 13:24–30 is in stark opposition to all forms of premillennialism. The pessimism of amillennialism is consistent with the parable of the wheat and tares, as is the optimism of postmillennialism. The parable does not say which seed will dominate the field. The pessimism of premillennialism is not consistent with the parable, for it affirms a discontinuity that the parable denies.

The kingdom parable of the mustard seed (v. 31) is consistent only with postmillennialism.[7] The mustard seeds starts small and expands. Thus, Matthew 13 rejects premillennialism and promotes postmillennialism. When believed, postmillennialism promotes investments in culture-wide Christian projects. This outlook promotes future-orientation. It also declares that the return on today's investment in Christendom will produce a positive return. Future-orientation—the willingness to accept a low interest rate—when coupled with the promise of compound growth produces the investments that produce the capital that gets compounded.

D. Continuity and Success

We are told to pray as a widow who bangs on the door of an unjust judge, until she receives judgment (Luke 18:2–6).[8] That is to say, do not stop. Keep at it. Overcome resistance by persistence. The same strategy applies to our callings. "No man, having put his hand to

5. "Dominion: A Dangerous New Theology," Tape 1 of *Dominion: The Word and New World Order*.

6. North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pp. 199–203.

7. See Chapter 30.

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).[9] We do not plow for the sake of plowing. We plow for the sake of harvesting and consuming or selling the harvest.

1. Line Upon Line

It is the steady worker who stays resolutely at his task who wins. The story of the tortoise and the hare are part of Western man's worldview. Making it big on little deals is the correct procedure. "But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (Isa. 28:13). "And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land" (Ex. 23:28–30).

Inheritance extends across generations. So does God's covenant. So do His commandments. "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them" (Deut. 7:9–11). The kingdom of God extends through history. Its persistence is its greatest strength. It does not go away.

Success parallels the kingdom in history. In fact, success is defined correctly only in terms of the kingdom of God. It is not my autonomous success that defines my success; rather, it is the part I play in the kingdom of God. Success is therefore based on continuity. It is also based on expansion. It is not that the kingdom holds its own; it spreads, as leaven spreads. The kingdom of God is not a holding action. It is a program of conquest.

2. Amillennial Pessimism and Paralysis

The amillennialist looks at the kingdom and sees, at best, a holding action. Usually, he sees cultural surrender. He sees the church as a tiny band of stalwarts, surrounded by an ever-increasing enemy. Even those

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

amillennialists who, like Van Til, rejected pietism, have created bleak expectations that paralyze long-term projects and commitments. Van Til warned against the temptation succumbed to by the premillennial fundamentalism of his day to "spend a great deal of their time in passive waiting instead of in active service. Another danger that lurks at a time of apostasy is that the few faithful ones give up the comprehensive ideal of the kingdom and limit themselves to the saving of individual souls."[10] He warned against ethical individualism. He understood that such individualism is a denial of covenant theology.

He believed with all his heart that evil triumphs visibly in history, and righteousness loses the culture war. He taught throughout his career that the principles of evil produce visible power and victory, whereas the principles of righteous living under God produce historical defeat. History is not neutral; one side or the other wins; one ethical system or the other produces victory; and Van Til sided with those who proclaim that Satan's system works (wins) in history. He made this plain: "But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for 'the day of grace,' the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such tolerance as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development."[11]

Notice especially his words, "we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for 'the day of grace,' the day of undeveloped differentiation." This is nothing short of a ghastly reworking of the idea of God's grace. He knew it, too, which is why he puts the words the day of grace in quotation marks. He knew that it is the opposite of grace that Christians are not fully self-conscious epistemologically, and more to the point, ethically. But his amillennialism had a stranglehold on his theory of ethics. He viewed today's earlier so-called "day of grace" as a day in which covenant-breakers are also not fully self-conscious, and this,

10. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, vol. 3 of *In Defense of Biblical Christianity* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1958] 1980), p. 122.

11. Van Til, *Common Grace* (1947), in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), p. 85.

in the amillennialist's universe of progressive Church impotence and progressive humanist power, is a good thing for covenant-keepers in an external, cultural sense. In short, as time goes on, covenant-breakers will retain control—Satan's doctrine of "squatter's rights"[12]—and steadily consolidate their hold over world civilization as they become more consistent with their religion, while covenant-keepers will fail to gain or lose control over civilization because they become more consistent with their religion. This is the ethical outlook of both premillennialism and amillennialism. Ethics is tied to eschatology. *If your eschatology is incorrect, your ethics will be incorrect if your worldview is internally consistent*. To teach that the progress of the gospel in history is not progressive, i.e., that the gospel does not lead to worldwide dominion by covenant-keepers, is to teach that ethical cause and effect in history is perverse, testifying not to a God who keeps His promises in history but rather to a god who breaks them.[13]

3. Lost-Cause Evangelism

Those in the amillennial and premillennial camps who are upset that we theonomic postmillennialists dismiss their eschatological views as if they were not worth considering have failed to recognize that our uncompromising hostility to rival eschatological views is based on our commitment to biblical ethics. Our eschatology is deeply influenced by our view of biblical law and its effects in history. It is not this or that rival interpretation of this or that prophetic Bible passage that is the primary focus of our concern. It is rather the overall view held by our eschatological opponents, which affirms the culture-losing effects of biblical law in history, that draws our fire. Their view of history is not neutral; it is not random; and it surely is not "even." It is perverse: a belief that God will not bless covenant-keeping in history, and will not curse covenant-breaking.

Most people will not sacrifice for a guaranteed lost cause. They will be interested mainly in escaping the worst things that a life of assured defeat has to offer. It is naive to expect men to commit everything they own to a campaign which God has announced in advance that His people must lose. Only a handful of suicidal fanatics will do this, and the church is not built up by such people.

12. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 61.

13. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), ch. 3.

For those Christians who believe that God has abandoned history to the devil, mysticism is one way out. The Eastern church has adopted weekly mysticism through intensive liturgy as its way to cope with an oppressive history. The Western church has sometimes had mystical movements, but on the whole, Western Christianity is too judicial for mysticism to gain a foothold. Protestant amillennialists have adopted the fortress mentality: the church as a defensive institution. They call people into the fortress. They call people out of cultural confrontation and into the cloister. The churches hesitate to conquer occupied ground, for they teach that such ground will eventually be reconquered by the enemy. To spend time, money, and emotional commitment to conquer territory that will have to be surrendered later is no general's idea of a successful strategy. A good general does not call on all of his men to die for a lost cause.

What the Bible teaches is cultural victory through generational inheritance.[14] It teaches that God's people can and will extend His kingdom into every nook and cranny of existence. Wherever sin holds territory, there must the conflict take place. The two kingdoms issue comprehensive claims. They have comprehensive programs and strategies. Christianity conquers slowly, but it conquers comprehensively. Whenever it surrenders territory, it must mark that lost ground for a future conflict. This is not done today, because Christians have denied the biblical covenant model. They have substituted an Arminian view of God for Augustine's, Luther's[15] and Calvin's predestinating God. They have substituted a doctrine of polytheistic civil government for Trinitarian theocracy. They have substituted natural law for biblical law. They have denied that God brings corporate sanctions in history in terms of biblical law. They have substituted eschatologies of guaranteed cultural defeat for the church in place of postmillennialism. They have redefined the kingdom of God to apply only to souls, families, and churches. Then they have called men to extend this truncated kingdom by means of gospel tracts, rescue missions, and toe-tapping music with lyrics only marginally more challenging theologically than children's songs. Having set their sights low, Christians have achieved even less.

14. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

15. Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will* (1525).

Conclusion

Eschatology is important for culture. Rival views of the future produce different plans and different results. This passage teaches that there will be no discontinuous reversal in history for covenant-keepers. The great discontinuity comes only at the end of time: final judgment. This means that Bible passages that are invoked to defend a future secret Rapture in the midst of history are being misused. They apply only to the events immediately preceding the final judgment.

The top priority derived from this passage is the building of confidence in the kingdom's cultural future. There will be no great eschatological reversal in the midst of history. Covenant-breaking society will not overturn the kingdom work of covenant-keepers. An investment made today in the building of any aspect of the kingdom of God has the potential for compounding over time. This lowers the risk of making such investments. Such investments are not doomed eschatologically. When believed, this eschatological outlook will increase the number of such investments for two reasons: increased future-orientation and reduced risk of failure.

30

HOPE AND COMMITMENT

> *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*
>
> MATTHEW 13:31–33

The theocentric focus here was the kingdom of heaven, which in the other gospels is referred to as the kingdom of God. The issue was growth: point five of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Small Beginnings

Jesus spoke these words to residents of a tiny nation which was under the rule of a great empire. His listeners were a captive people. Their nation had been under the rule of other empires for six centuries. Here was a limited audience indeed. Yet Jesus spoke to them in terms of great expectations.

The kingdom of God had been bottled up in Israel until the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Then it gained limited influence outside the borders of the Promised Land. But this influence had not transformed the empires that had ruled over Israel. A few kings had been impressed with the God of Israel, but this did not change the religious commitment of their empires.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

The temple of Jesus' day was a great structure, but its rebuilding had begun over four decades earlier under a gentile king, Herod—the king who later sought to kill the infant Jesus.[2] The sacrifices still went on, but the world did not come to Israel in supplication. The kingdom of God was visible to those who wanted to see it, but few did. The Old Testament was available on scrolls, but only a handful of people possessed copies. The kingdom of God in Jesus' day was a highly circumscribed phenomenon.

This was not to remain true much longer, but Jesus' listeners did not know this at the time. They had seen no victories. All they saw was foreign tyranny. They longed for deliverance, but there was no evidence that deliverance was possible. Yet Jesus was preaching victory: the expansion of the kingdom of God. He spoke of small beginnings and large results. There was no doubt in His mind: the kingdom of God was not a small matter. Despite the fact that His was a day of small beginnings, He told His listeners that something significant was in their midst. They could become part of a great kingdom. He had just told them, "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28).[3]

They had seen this or had heard of it. Jesus was telling them that a new period of kingdom growth was imminent.

This was hard to believe. For too long, Israel had been isolated, trodden down by gentiles. The nation had never been large. After all these centuries, would the nation of Israel now become a significant factor in world history? Or did Jesus mean something else? Was the kingdom about to be separated from the nation? What did He really mean? Even His disciples were confused, which is why they came to Him in private for explanations of His kingdom parables.

B. The Mustard Seed

The mustard seed is small. Its results are great. The disparity between what is visible at the beginning and what takes place at the end is the heart of this analogy. Elsewhere, Jesus made the same comparison with respect to men's faith. "And Jesus said unto them, Because of

2. Herod was a major builder. See Dwayne W. Roller, *The Building Program of Herod the Great* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

3. In Luke's account, we read: "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke 11:20). This points back to the giving of the law. "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Ex. 31:18).

your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20). "And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" (Luke 17:6).

The message was clear: that which is visibly small can have important results in the future. Do not be fooled by the initial indications. What lies ahead is much greater than what is visible today. He who focuses solely on what is visible today will be misled by what he sees. That which is visible today is not representative of that which will be visible later. *Without faith, the tyranny of the present will overwhelm the faithful.* Rome looked large; the kingdom of God looked small. Rome had great power; the kingdom of God did not seem to. But this was an illusion, Jesus said. The mustard seed does not reveal the future results. Those who knew something of mustard seeds could understand what Jesus was saying. Those without this knowledge could not.

What is visible today should not paralyze faithful men by undermining their confidence in the future. The mustard seed today is not what is important; what it will become is important. The same is true of God's kingdom. Jesus told His listeners of great things to come. The reality of these great things would have to be accepted on faith. But for those who took His words seriously, this new optimism would motivate them to work to extend God's kingdom in history.

C. The Transforming Effect of Leaven

Another brief analogy continued the theme of growth. The kingdom is like leaven. Leaven is inserted into dough in order to make it rise. A small amount produces visible growth throughout the dough. The loaf rises because of the presence of the leaven. The leaven spreads through all of the dough, affecting all of it.

Elsewhere, Jesus spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees. "Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6). At first, they did not understand His meaning, but later they did. "Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:12). The doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees would produce a different kind of loaf. Jesus was setting forth the image of dough that would accept either

form of leaven. The leaven of the kingdom is also doctrinal. It presents a specific view of God, man, law, sanctions, and the future. Rival kingdoms are based on rival views of these same covenantal doctrines.

Leaven can be positive or negative, Jesus said. In the temple sacrifices, leaven was never offered on the altar (Lev. 2:11).[4] But the firstfruits offering had to be leavened bread (Lev. 23:17). So, leaven was not a symbol of evil. It was a symbol of growth. The question is: Which leaven will raise the dough of history? Whose leaven will succeed in transforming the dough of civilization? God's or Satan's?

Jesus was arguing that the leaven of the kingdom raises the dough of history to produce the good bread. The leaven of the firstfruits is to be seen as representative of the final bread. The kingdom of God in history will be triumphant. The whole loaf is raised up, Jesus said. The loaf is a metaphor for history.

D. Eschatology and Hope

These two analogies—mustard seed and leaven—offer hope to God's people, and not just hope for eternity, but hope for history. The eschatology of these two analogies is clearly optimistic. It is based on the comprehensive transforming power of God's kingdom in history.

This hope which is designed to motivate God's people to extend His kingdom. The extension of God's kingdom is the essence of the dominion covenant. The whole world is to be subdued by God's people for the glory of God. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) is the New Covenant's reaffirmation of the original dominion covenant given to Adam (Gen. 1:26–28).[5]

Hope undergirds action. He who is without earthly hope finds it costly to commit resources to projects that cannot succeed. Jesus set forth a vision of the world transformed. *He called His servants to participate in this endeavor*. He told them of the world-transforming results of their earthly efforts. He did not tell them that their efforts would always be overshadowed by the leaven of rival kingdoms. He called them to replace the rival leavens with the leaven of God's kingdom.

Hope is a powerful motivation. Confidence in the future is a personally transforming force. The Communists once possessed this

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 2:B.

5. Chapter 48. See also Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 1.

hope.[6] They saw themselves as the vanguard of the proletarian victory. Their efforts transformed one-third of the world in the twentieth century and influenced much of the remainder. But when they lost hope, they faltered. The Communist movement died an embarrassing death, August 19–21, 1991, in the failed Communist Party coup in the Soviet Union. In a few days, the world was laughing at the seemingly drunken bureaucrats who had attempted to reclaim leadership for the Communist Party. Laughter doomed Russian Communism.

Hope for the future lowers the cost of action in the present. A law of economics is this: as the cost of anything falls, more of it is demanded (other things remaining equal). Here is an application of this principle: *greater hope for the future produces greater sacrifice in the present*. The investment of capital in the present finances the growth of the kingdom. By promising great things in the future, Jesus was presenting the case for His followers' increased commitment of resources to building the kingdom.

Conclusion

God extends His visible rule in history through the efforts of Christians. His kingdom replaces the rival kingdoms of Satan. Because God is sovereign, His kingdom cannot fail in history. No matter how small it seems at any time, it will expand in history. Its invisibility today is in contrast with its visibility in the future.

The top priority for covenant-keeping man is the extension of God's kingdom in history. This has been true ever since God told Adam to subdue the earth. Sin has made this task more difficult. Rival kingdoms now compete for control in history.

Jesus told His listeners that the kingdom of God would not always remain small. It would expand. He was inviting His listeners to participate in this expansion. They were not to despise the day of small beginnings. Instead, they were to commit themselves to a process that would transcend time and borders.

He gave them hope. This hope was to serve God's people as a motivation for their sacrificial commitment, generation after generation. Without this hope of earthly success over time, commitment to the dominion covenant becomes more expensive. Men are less likely to commit the resources necessary for victory if they do not expect victory. The cost is too high.

6. F. N. Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1974).

31

HIDDEN TREASURE

> *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*
>
> MATTHEW 13:44–46

The theocentric principle here was the high value of the kingdom of God. It is so high that a wise man will sell all that he has in order to buy it if it is available for purchase. The next parable in the passage reinforces this one: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:45–46). The covenantal issue was sanctions.[1]

A. Lost and Found[2]

This parable seems to be contradictory to the Mosaic law of lost property: "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 4.

2. This section and the one that follows is taken from Chapter 51 of Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass; and so shalt thou do with his raiment; and with all lost things of thy brother's, which he hath lost, and thou hast found, shalt thou do likewise: thou mayest not hide thyself. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again" (Deut. 22:1–4). Why isn't Jesus' example a case of lost property? Why isn't the finder required to report it to the presumed owner, i.e., the owner of the field? Because the treasure had been deliberately hidden.

Jesus was challenging Old Covenant Israel to cease hiding the treasure of salvation in a morass of legalism. The kingdom of heaven is not supposed to be hidden; it is to be shared with all the world. But someone had taken the treasure and had hidden it, He said. This was similar to the action taken by the responsibility-aversive wicked servant who refused to multiply his master's goods as a faithful steward—another kingdom parable.

> Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:24–30).[3]

The person who discovers a hidden treasure is not under any obligation to inform the owner of the field of its existence. Someone had taken steps to hide the asset. The original owner had decided to invest the treasure merely by hiding it. This is not the best way to increase wealth except in times of warfare or widespread theft. It is better to put the asset to work. The hidden asset probably is not being used productively. The finder takes a great risk by selling everything he owns to make a bid on the field. The field's owner, if he knows about the treasure, may dig it up and then sell the field—now far over-

3. Chapter 47.

priced—to the finder. But if the field's owner does not know about the hidden treasure, the buyer is not under any moral obligation to tell him about it. The field's buyer is reclaiming the asset from the heirs of the original treasure-hider, who know nothing about the whereabouts of the treasure and who did not hide it. They have no legal claims on this property. They are not like the owner of lost property, who does have a legal claim. The treasure in the field is not marked. It is not the responsibility of the discoverer to seek out the heirs, who may be scattered across the face of the earth, depending on how long the treasure has been hidden. The person most likely to put the hidden treasure to productive use is the treasure-finder who is willing to sell all that he has to buy the field.

The Jews had hidden God's kingdom in Jesus' era. They were hoarding it. They were not taking it in its pure form to the gentiles. They had encrusted it with layers of man-made law, thereby hiding it. This was hampering the growth of the kingdom. This is why Jesus also said: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Jesus was telling His listeners that they had found the hidden treasure: the kingdom of heaven. It was time for them to commit everything they owned to the spread of the good news of redemption to gentiles as well as to Jews. The Jews refused to admit that what they had done by way of legalism and nationalism had concealed the kingdom from gentiles. Thus, the kingdom would soon rightfully be the property of the church, which would strip the message of redemption from its legalism and share it with the world. It was not that the kingdom had been lost; it had been deliberately hidden by the Jews and kept out of plain sight. Thus, the Mosaic law of lost property did not apply in this parable.

B. Idle Resources and Entrepreneurship

The economic principle governing hidden treasure is what W. H. Hutt called the theory of idle resources. Hidden treasure is not idle if it is the object of human decision-making. It is invested in a particular way. When resources are deliberately not being used to produce goods and services, this may be because of the owners' lack of information about how to maximize the value of the unused asset, i.e., to make it worth more in production than it is sitting idle. Or it may be because the owner is highly risk-aversive. Hutt's economic analysis also identifies bottlenecks of information created by government

policy, such as minimum wage laws or other forms of price control.[4]

When an idle resource is idle because no one recognizes it as valuable, or because the owner has forgotten where it is hidden, then the way to get it back into production is to allow a finder to buy it. This is an application of the Austrian school's theory of entrepreneurship: profit as the result of the decision of an entrepreneur who bears the economic uncertainty associated with production. He believes that he possesses better knowledge regarding future customer demand than his competitors do. He buys a productive good at a price that is lower than it would be if all producers recognized its highest future use. If his forecast is correct, and if he puts the underpriced asset to cost-effective use, then he gains his reward: an above-average rate of return on his investment. If his forecast is incorrect, or if he misallocates the resource, then he reaps losses.

To maximize the spread of accurate information and any customer benefits associated with this information, the free market social order allows entrepreneurs to buy fields containing "hidden treasure." These fields are in the form of scarce resources that are not priced as high as they would be if other entrepreneurs knew the truth: hidden treasures are buried in them, i.e., there are benefits that customers will be willing to pay for. These treasures are analogous to forgotten or ignored resources that are not being put to their maximum customer-satisfying uses. In short, accurate information regarding the future is not the equivalent of a lost sheep that has wandered off and will soon be missed by the owner. It is the equivalent of a treasure buried long ago: taken out of production by a previous owner, and then forgotten. There is no moral reason why someone who finds a way to serve the public better through putting that treasure back into production should be required to broadcast this information to anyone. But he must not steal it; he must buy the field in which it is hidden. He must bear the costs of gaining ownership.[5]

C. Risk and Information

Consider what the man in the parable was doing. He stumbles across an important piece of information. There is a valuable treasure hidden in a field. He is not sure just who it was who hid it, but it is there.

4. W. H. Hutt, *The Theory of Idle Resources: A Study in Definition*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1977).

5. The remainder of the chapter, though not the Conclusion, is taken from an essay that appeared in *The Freeman*: "Exploitation and Knowledge" (Jan. 1982).

He presumes that the person who hid it is not the present owner of the field. He is not certain of this at first, but he is willing to take a major step. He hides the treasure again, and goes out and sells everything that he owns. I suppose he did some preliminary investigating, just to see if the present owner will sell the field. But the present owner may change his mind. Or he may have known about the treasure all the time, and he is luring the speculator into a disastrous decision. The treasure may not really be that valuable. The discoverer cannot be certain. But he takes a chance. He sells everything, and goes to the owner with his money. He buys the field. Now he owns the treasure. He took advantage of special information: his knowledge of the existence of a treasure in a particular field. He took a risk when he sold everything that he owned to come up with the purchase price. Then he went back to the owner, thereby alerting the owner to a possible opportunity—the possibility that something valuable is connected to the field. Maybe it would be unwise to sell it after all. But finally he decides to sell. The entrepreneur—the man with the information and some venture capital—has closed the deal. He has attained his goal.

D. The Socialist View

The modern socialist would be outraged at this parable. He says, "The entrepreneur, who was striving to better his position, was acting immorally. First, the land he was on should have been owned by the people, through the state. Second, he had no business being on the land, without proper papers having been filed with the state in advance. Third, he should never have hidden the treasure again. It was the state's. Fourth, if it was not the property of the state, then he should have notified the private owner of the property. Fifth, failing this, he was immoral to make the offer to buy the property. He as stealing from the poor man who owned the property. Sixth, should he attempt to sell the treasure, the state ought to tax him at a minimum rate of 80 per cent. Seventh, if he refuses to sell, the state should impose a property tax, or a direct capital tax, to force him to sell."

What the socialist-redistributionist really objects to is mankind's lack of omniscience. The economy should operate as smoothly, as efficiently, and as profit-free as an economy in which each participant has perfect knowledge. Knowledge, in a "decent" social order, is a universally available free good, equally available to all, and equally acted upon by all. It is only the existence of private property, personal greed, and a willingness to exploit the poor that has created

our world of scarcity, profits, and losses. Knowledge about the future should be regarded as a free good. Profits are therefore evil, not to mention unnecessary, in a sound economy. This has been the argument—the real, underlying, implicit argument—of all those who equate profits and exploitation.

Men are not God; they are not omniscient. This angers the socialists, and they strike out in wrath against the market order which seeks to encourage men to search for better information so that they can profit from its application in economic affairs. The socialists prefer to stop the search for information concerning the uncertain future, rather than to allow private citizens to profit personally from the use of knowledge in society.

E. The Transfer of Knowledge

Accurate knowledge of the future is a valuable asset. How can society profit from its discovery and application? Not everyone wants to take the time and trouble to forecast the future. No one can take the time and trouble to search out all the possible bits of information concerning an uncertain future that might be useful to him or his family. So, we allow specialists to bear the risks of action, and sell us the results at a price that we are willing and able to pay. We customers become the users, and therefore the beneficiaries, of the entrepreneur's willingness and ability to peer into the future, take steps to meet the demand of the uncertain future, and deliver the finished product—consumer good, consumer service, or spiritual insight—at a price we are willing to pay. Why should we care what price he paid or what risks he bore when we pay the price? Of course, if we knew what he paid, we might guess that he is willing to take less than what he is asking, but why should we care from a moral standpoint what he paid versus what he is asking us to pay?

Besides, the existence of a profit on a transaction, if recognized by others, encourages other entrepreneurs to search out similar opportunities to present to us in the future. Let us consider the entrepreneur-worker. He accepts the job with ABC Widgets. The workers throw a farewell party for him. The conversation inevitably gets around to the reason why he is leaving. "Hey, Charlie, why are you leaving XYZ Widgets? Haven't we had great times together? What are you trying to do, get on their bowling team or something?" And Charlie may be willing to say, now that he knows he has his new job. He can look like a smart operator in front of his friends. "I'm leaving

because I'm going to make twice my present pay, that's why. Why should I stay here at XYZ Widgets and work for less than I'm worth?" That bit of information will make itself felt in the labor market of XYZ Widgets very, very fast. The management of XYZ Widgets will have to do some explaining, and perhaps make some wage adjustments for the workers, as the effects of the new knowledge are felt. Workers leave for ABC Widgets. The spread of information is rapid because the pay-off for those who have it is immediate and personally beneficial for those who act in terms of it.

F. Profiting from Better Knowledge

Knowledge is a scarce economic resource. It is a good thing for members of society to act in terms of accurate information. It is certainly a wise policy to allow citizens to profit from the use of better knowledge. That way, there is an economic incentive for others to enter the "knowledge market" and take advantage of whatever knowledge is available. The spread of accurate knowledge is increased because of the profit potential offered to acting individuals. If better knowledge is a valuable asset, then its sale in the market should be encouraged.

Inaccurate knowledge should be abandoned rapidly. How do we best stop the transfer of inaccurate knowledge? Make it expensive to act in terms of inaccurate knowledge. This is why we need opportunities to make losses as well as profits. Make the use of inaccurate knowledge expensive to those who use it, and you will discourage its transfer through the whole society. This is perhaps more important than encouraging the production or discovery of new, accurate knowledge. There are always more good ideas available than capital to finance them. But the continued use of bad ideas—loss-producing ideas—inhibits the build-up of capital. It is always very risky to launch a new project, since there are so many variables. But dropping a bad economic idea is an immediate benefit to society, for it increases the capital base—the information base—by removing a major source of capital consumption. The existence of losses testifies to the existence of inappropriate plans in an economy. Without negative feedback—the loss portion of the profit-and-loss sheet—society has no effective way to eliminate bad economic ideas. If men see the danger of establishing censorship boards to reduce the spread of knowledge, they had better cling to the free market's mechanism for eliminating erroneous information.

Conclusion

The ethics of the parable is based on the suggestion that a treasure in a field belongs to the owner of the field. The field in this case belonged to Old Covenant Israel. This would not be true for much longer (Matt. 21:43). Hidden in that field was a lost treasure: the kingdom of God. To obtain possession of this treasure, the discoverer was told to commit everything he owns.

The top priority here is extending the kingdom of God. The proper response to the news of the kingdom is for a person to commit everything he owns to its extension. It is more valuable than personal wealth. It is the ultimate form of wealth.

There is another implication: *do not hide this treasure*. Israel had hidden it and was therefore about to lose possession of it. To keep ownership of it, a person or a society must share it. Its value increases as it is shared with others. The kingdom's division of labor increases when more people come into it. Its productivity increases because every participant's wealth increases. As with the telephone or other communications technology, the more people who use phones, the greater the value of the system to everyone. One telephone is useless. Two are not worth much. A large telephone system is very valuable. Each additional installed telephone increases the value of all of them, even though mass production decreases its price. So it is with the kingdom of God.

32

TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

MATTHEW 13:52

The theocentric principle here was progress in history, point five of the biblical covenant.[1] The kingdom of God offers those who understand it a way to preserve what is good in history, yet also innovate.

A. The Old Covenant Scribe

The Old Covenant scribe knew the Mosaic law. He was literate. He could read and write. He possessed authority because he possessed this technical understanding. But this was not enough. He also was supposed to understand God's written word. Jesus recognized that His disciples would have to possess comparable knowledge if they were to replace the scribes as agents possessing authority. "Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord" (v. 51). They were confident that they understood, despite the fact that they had just come to ask Him what His parable of the tares and wheat meant.

The disciples had to become masters of understanding and exposition, for the New Covenant church was about to replace the old priestly order. The office of priest would disappear when the temple and its sacrifices ended. What would replace this office? Jesus

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

made the answer clear in this long-ignored passage. *A New Testament expositor would be a scribe*. He would have to declare the word of God in terms of the Old Covenant and the New. He would have to be a master of the Old Covenant and a minister of the New. Only through such public declaration could he gain greater authority than that possessed by the Old Covenant scribes.

Jesus had already begun this transfer of authority. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28–29).

Jesus had just finished describing the kingdom of God in a series of parables, analogies, and metaphors. Now He added a final analogy: the scribe, in his capacity as an interpreter of the kingdom, is like a householder with a treasure. Once again, Jesus moved the framework of discussion to the realm of economics.

B. *Oikos*

The word "economics" comes from the Greek word for house: *oikos*. This is the Greek root word for "householder," which we find in this passage. The household is the fundamental economic unit because it is where the division of labor begins. Wives help husbands; husbands support wives; both support children. The household is the starting point for a correct understanding of exchange and specialization.

The successful householder possesses treasure. This treasure includes old things: antiques. It also possesses new items. The mix of old and new is basic to the successful household. It is therefore basic to an economy.

The old items represent tradition. Men look back to the past in search of meaning. Who they are today, what they do, and what they possess depend on what took place in the past. Men respect the past because it made possible the present. It shaped the present. Men keep old objects that remind them of what went before, especially whatever went before that endures and is worth preserving.

The passage speaks of treasure. Items from the past have value because they are testimonies to the ways of success. They are also scarce. They are not being produced any longer. They are in limited supply. This makes them valuable when there is demand for them.

The passage also speaks of new items of value. The successful householder is alert to change. He lives in a changing world. He must respond to new demand and new techniques of production employed

by his competitors. He must look into the future and guess what conditions will be like then. He must make plans now in order to prepare for the unknown future.

This is why new things are important. The householder possesses new things to make his life more productive or enjoyable. History does not stand still. There is progress. The wise man is alert to the reality of change. He buys or makes new possessions that enable him to keep up. To fail to do this is to fall behind. It is to remove oneself from the world of one's contemporaries.

C. The New Covenant Scribe

The New Covenant was about to replace the Old Covenant. Jesus' ministry was the first stage of this transition. "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). His death and resurrection would inaugurate the second stage, which lasted 40 days. On the basis of His resurrection, He announced His new power: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). Then came His ascension to heaven (Acts 1), which was followed by the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). Finally, the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 marked the completion of the transition—the end of Old Covenant Israel and the cessation of new revelation.[2]

This was a covenantal discontinuity. The church would henceforth serve as the scribe: announcing what was still in force of the Old Covenant while applying the New Covenant to specific circumstances. The break from the past was not total. There was continuity, for the same God who revealed Himself in the Old Covenant has revealed Himself in the New. How was the church to regard the kingdom? As something old and new. As something that extended to the whole world that which God had begun in Israel.

The New Covenant scribe therefore looks back to the past and proclaims the future. He honors the past while working toward a far better future. He tells old stories and announces new applications of lessons learned. He is neither a priest nor a prophet. He does not offer sacrifices, nor does he speak with such authority that kings must obey him. He receives no authoritative revelations from God. The canon of Scripture is closed. His authority comes from his understanding of

2. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

the written word of God, just as the Old Covenant scribe's authority came. The New Covenant scribe applies to the present the written word's declaration of the past and future. He brings forth treasures of the past and the present. He looks to the future. He is future-oriented in a way that the scribes in Jesus' day should have been but were not.

D. The Inheritance

The biblical concept of inheritance links past, present, and future. Each generation is to add to the inheritance it has received. The inheritance is not so much a bloodline inheritance as confessional. The kingdom of God expands because it is cumulative. It extends over time; therefore it extends over borders. It develops.

Inheritance is normally associated with families. The *oikos* is the place where children learn of their inheritance: what was left to the household by the forefathers, and what will be left to it. The inheritance is both name and capital. The transition takes place with the death of the testator.

The crucial New Covenant inheritance is eternal life. This inheritance was suggested in the Old Covenant in Daniel 12:1–3. "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." Second, in Job 19:25–27: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." In the New Covenant, eternal inheritance replaces family inheritance as the central concept of inheritance.

The Epistle to the Hebrews ties eternal inheritance to the death of Christ. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is

the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (Heb. 9:13–17).

The biblical doctrine of inheritance provided the basis of the concept of economic growth. *Linear history is affirmed by the biblical concept of inheritance*. But because the inheritance promised the whole world to the righteous,[3] it implied the doctrine of corporate economic growth. The inheritance of the faithful will compound over time. This was a revolutionary idea in the ancient world, which believed in cyclical history. Not only is time linear, Jesus taught, it is progressive.

The inheritance passes down through the generations. It is therefore both past-oriented and future-oriented. The past has value today because it confirms God's faithfulness over time. It reinforces covenant-keeping men's faith in the future. The past testifies to the future. The continuity provided by covenantal inheritance gives covenant-keepers confidence in the future.

E. The Idea of Progress

Confidence in the future is vital for risk-bearing and uncertainty-bearing.[4] It is vital to progress. The covenant-keeper can afford to risk much in his efforts to extend God's kingdom. He has inherited much. He has confidence in God's sustaining hand. This or that project may fail, but the kingdom expands. He may fail, but others involved in kingdom projects will succeed. His efforts are part of a comprehensive program of corporate dominion.

The past testifies to the existence of progress. This is the lesson of the householder in the analogy. He has old treasures and new treasures to show as his inheritance. The West is the product of this worldview. Linear history, economic progress, and the covenantal link between past, present, and future have all contributed to the West's doctrine of progress. Men have had faith that their efforts will lead to a better world, not just in heaven but also in history. Progress in the past has proven the reliability of their faith in the future. While this

3. Psalm 25:13; 37:9; 37:11; 37:22.

4. The two are different. Risk is statistically calculable in advance through probability theory. Uncertainty is not. See Frank H. Knight, Risk, *Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921).

vision of linear progress has become increasingly secularized since the seventeenth century, its roots go deep in the West's theology.[5]

Conclusion

The scribe, not the priest, is the model of the New Covenant pastor. He is to declare the whole counsel of God. He is to seek in the Old Covenant standards for the New. He is to apply Old Covenant principles to New Covenant situations. He is to affirm the continuity of the covenants, just as the householder brings out old and new treasures.

The top priority of the faithful scribe is to understand the progressive continuity of the kingdom of God. He must not neglect the old or the new. He is to look to the past in search of standards for the present. He is to look to God's word in his attempt to envision the future. He works toward the future in the present on the basis of revelation given in the past. He sees cumulative successes in the past and thereby gains hope for the future.

A church that cuts itself off from the present for the sake of the past will wind up out of touch with the present. Its message will carry little authority, just as the Old Covenant scribes in Jesus' day did not possess much authority. It will become a museum for antiquarians. It will not shape the future because it does not attempt to change the present. It calls people out of the present in the name of the past. It calls people to celebrate the past in the name of continuity. But the continuity of evil compounds if it is not overcome by the leaven of righteousness. *A call to the past in the name of the past is an abdication in the present in the name of eternity*. It cuts the present off from eternity except by way of the past. It ignores the doctrine of progressive corporate sanctification. It leaves the world in the hands of Christ's enemies.

On the other hand, a church that cuts itself off from the past will be forever exhausted trying to keep up with the present. Having no history—no testament, no inheritance—it will also have little authority. Having no rudder, it will lose direction in the waves of change. In the name of the present, it destroys faith in the future. Having dismissed the past, the church thereby dismisses the relevance of the present, for why should its heirs in the future honor the present? The tyranny of the present is no less a tyranny than the tyranny of the past, and no less doomed to failure. If anything, the tyranny of the

5. Robert A. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 And All That," *Commentary* (June 1968).

past is more likely to persevere. The tyranny of the past has persevered, so it is likely to continue to persevere.

This is equally true of any organization. A business must keep old customers and attract new ones. A political party must keep old voters and recruit new ones. Any organization that ignores its existing supporters, whose capital and tastes are linked to the past, will be cut off financially. The bulk of any organization's income comes from past customers or supporters. Yet any organization that caters primarily to its existing supporters will find itself buried when they are. The answer is continuity: past, present, and future. The kingdom of God is the model of such continuity, for it extends into eternity (Rev. 21; 22).

33

BUDGETS REVEAL PRIORITIES

> *But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.*
>
> MATTHEW 15:3–6

The theocentric principle here was that God is honored more by obeying His law than by obeying man's law. There is a hierarchy of priorities, point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. First Things First

The commandment to honor parents takes precedence over gifts to the temple. This point is made even clearer in Mark's account: "But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free" (Mark 7:11). Corban was a gift to the temple. When Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver, "the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury [corban], because it is the price of blood" (Matt. 27:6).

The Pharisees' personal pattern of expenditure reflected their commitment to a particular view of law. Jesus warned them that their

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

budgets were in error. Their budgets revealed that the law to which they were committed was not God's moral law, as revealed by the commandment to honor parents.

B. Undermining Authority

The Pharisees had criticized Jesus' disciples in an attempt to undermine His authority. If He allowed them to get away with something, this meant that He approved of their actions. It was safer for His critics to attack His subordinates than to attack Him directly. Yet it was clear who the target was: Jesus.

Jesus took a more direct approach. He undermined their authority by attacking their hypocrisy. When it came to their pocketbooks, they placed second things first. They placed their public reputation above their familial responsibility. They gave to the temple, not to their parents. They were trying to be holier than God's law.

The Pharisees had constructed an elaborate system of law around the Mosaic law. They established man-made legal "fences" around the law. To keep people from violating the law, they added extra laws that supposedly would make the violation of a Mosaic law more difficult.[2] This system was a failure, Jesus warned. It made hypocrites of those who enforced it. They became more concerned about the fences than about the core ethical principles of the Mosaic law.

But then He went beyond this first-stage criticism of the hedge system. He rejected a distinguishing principle of the Mosaic law: the law of defiled food. He announced that this law had been a temporary principle of holiness. To this extent, it had been a hedge. It had segregated Old Covenant Israel from the nations. But that separation was about to end. The gentiles were about to be called into the church, and the kingdom transferred to the church (Matt. 21:43). Jesus here announced a moral principle that undermined the judicial authority of the Mosaic food laws. It therefore undermined the Mosaic law's separation of Jew and gentile. This is what God told Peter in Acts 10, just before the arrival of Cornelius, a gentile.

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2. This is the source of the same tradition in rabbinical Judaism. The rabbis frequently cite Leviticus 18:30: "Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God." The Hebrew word for "ordinance," on which rests the rabbinical tradition of man-made laws as fences, does not offer support for such an interpretation. It means "charge," "keep," or "watch."

C. The Economics of Obedience

Jesus was not here undermining the Ten Commandments. On the contrary, He appealed to the commandment to honor parents as having superior authority to gifts to the temple. Jesus used an example with economic implications as His means of undermining the Pharisees' authority. They had criticized the disciples' ritual negligence; He criticized them for elevating supplemental gifts to the temple over debts owed to parents. Jesus was saying that how people spend their money reveals more about their loyalties than the issues of religious ritual.

Money is the most marketable commodity. It can buy more things than any other commodity can. So, a budget reveals the budget-maker's priorities. He can use money to buy many things. By seeing what he buys, we can see what he regards as most important. The Pharisees' budgets revealed that they regarded their acceptance at the temple as more important than support of their parents. Jesus had warned His listeners:

> Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly (Matt. 6:1–6).[3]

In private, His critics refused to support their parents. In public, they gave gifts to the temple. It was clear where their priorities were: the praises of men. "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42–43). Paul later warned against this: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is

3. Chapter 11.

a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:28–29).

There was no doubt that Jesus was publicly undermining the Pharisees' authority. "Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:12–14). He was warning His listeners not to follow the Pharisees. If they did, they would wind up in the ditch. They would wind up being rooted up by God. This prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70.[4]

Conclusion

A budget is a revealing document. It is normally kept very private. People rarely discuss their pattern of expenditures with others. To see a man's budget is to invade his privacy. But God sees each man's lifetime budget. He knows where men's priorities are. He can determine from the budget whether a man seeks God's praise or men's praise. The budget that God requires of each man must reflect God's priorities for him. God's law must be reflected in their pattern of expenditures. This begins with a tithe paid to the local church.[5] This expenditure, more than any other, is to be the mark the covenant-keeper. The budgetary pattern of obedience extends to the support of aged parents. It also extends to the poor. God's presence among men and authority over men is to be reflected by His people's pattern of expenditures.

4. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

5. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

34

THE CRUMBS OF LIFE

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

MATTHEW 15:21–28

The theocentric principle here was that God is the source of all healing. The issue was sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. In a Gentile Nation

In Jesus' day, this healing extended outward from His ministry to Israel. The world of the gentiles was generally untouched by His ministry at this point. But this gentile woman recognized the source of healing: Jesus, the son of David. She viewed Him as the heir of the most famous king in Israel's history. She may even have understood some of the prophetic implications of His heirship.

Jesus was outside of the land of Israel. He was in a far country:

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 4.

Phoenicia. We are not told why. A woman who had heard of His ministry in Israel came to Him, requesting that her daughter be healed. "But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

She might have answered Him defiantly. "Then what are you doing in my country? Get back to where you belong!" It was a response that the religious authorities in Tyre and Sidon might have given. She might have rejected her one hope of healing for her daughter. But as a representative of someone she loved, she restrained herself. In fact, she subordinated herself. "Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me." He then escalated His rhetoric: "But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." This was harsh language. He compared her to a dog. He was comparing all gentiles to dogs. The bread of healing was for God's children, the Jews, He said.

She was not deterred. "And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." She was the dog; He was the master. Was she not therefore entitled to some crumbs? He said that she was. He healed her daughter at a distance.

Her subordination was to the point of humiliation. This was the proof of her great faith. "Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith." To prefer to be among the dogs rather than away from the master's table was the mark of true faith for a gentile.

The woman judicially represented her daughter. But she did more than this. She represented the gentile world. Her confession of faith was in sharp contrast to that of the leaders of Israel, who did their best to trap Jesus in some judicial contradiction, either Mosaic or Roman. She did not seek to contradict Jesus; she sought His greater consistency. "Yes, we are dogs, my daughter and I. But we are domesticated dogs. We are under the table, not out in the streets. Surely, domesticated dogs are entitled to some consideration." This confession of faith gained for her what she had sought.

It was a matter of confession. She confessed Jesus as master, as the son of David: a messianic office. Outside the land of Israel, this was a powerful confession. It was a greater confession than the Pharisees offered when they heard that He had cast out demons. "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (Matt. 12:24b). Her daughter had a devil. She wanted to have it cast out. There was demonic possession in Israel and in the gentile world, but this gentile welcomed Jesus as an exorcist; the Pharisees had not.

She acknowledged the need for healing in her daughter. The Pharisees did not any such need. That was what condemned them. Jesus had warned them: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:12b–13).

What was Jesus doing in the gentile coasts? He was announcing His authority. His authority was not confined to Israel. The proof of this was His ability to cast out unholy spirits in their land. "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). A major sign that the kingdom of God extended beyond the borders of Israel was the healing of her daughter. But it took her repeated confession of faith and personal subordination for this kingdom extension to take place.

What was true of this woman would soon be true of the nations. Her confession was an earnest—a down payment—on what would soon come under the auspices of the church, especially with Paul's ministry. The gentiles would be blessed through their confession.

B. Dog Food

The dogs under the table are entitled to crumbs. This confession led to her daughter's healing. It was a confession by a gentile. It was accounted as true faith.

Was her faith the equivalent of the faithful Israelite's? No, for she was outside the boundaries of the land. This put her in an inferior position. Until the scattering of the Jerusalem church after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), this geographical separation served as a visible mark of the confessing gentiles' second-class status. As for nonconfessing gentiles, they were like dogs in the street. They had the status of covenant-breaker.

Yet in a broader sense, covenant-breakers do have status as sons of God through Adam—disinherited sons. They are dogs under the table. They are entitled to crumbs. They participate in the community of man. They are under the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).[2] They are under God's law. The work of the law is written in their hearts (Rom. 2:15).[3]

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia, Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3–4.

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

There is a division of labor in society. Each individual is productive in some way.[4] Each brings any excess output of his labor for others to use. In this sense, each increases the wealth of others. For the sake of the adopted sons of God, the disinherited sons are allowed their time in history.

When God showers His blessings on a society, everyone is a recipient. "…he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45b).[5] This means that everyone becomes responsible for thanking God. With blessings come responsibilities. With common grace, all men come under the judgment of God. There is no escape. Paul wrote: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:18–20).[6] With every undeserved benefit, God places eternal coals of fire onto the heads of covenant-breakers.

Common grace is like dog food. It is not what God intends for His people. It is suitable for His enemies. It keeps them alive. It is nutritious. But it is not the best. It is not special grace. "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (I Tim. 4:10).[7] All men are saved, i.e., are temporarily healed from the death-producing curse of Adam. But all men are not given eternal life.

Conclusion

The Phoenician woman's top priority was the healing of her demon-possessed daughter. To achieve this, she was willing to suffer repeated rejection by the only person who could heal her daughter. She kept coming back. She always had a correct answer. She claimed

4. This assumes that he is not helpless. Babies, imbeciles, and Alzheimer's victims are excluded from the ranks of the productive. But they provide a service to society: tests of how men treat them. "Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" (Matt. 25:45).

5. Chapter 10.

6. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 10.

7. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 6.

what was hers by right: dog food. She was not arrogant, but she was persistent. She was like the widow of the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:2–5).[8] She kept banging on the door. She eventually got her request.

Her confession was more than an admission of Jesus' power. It was an admission of His office as master, the Davidic office. She was not deterred by His initial rejection of her request. The prize was worth pursuing. The testimony was worth confessing. By subordinating herself to God, she gained her top priority.

This is a lesson for all mankind. Subordination to God is basic to the dominion covenant. Confession of one's subordination to God is the first step to dominion. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

8. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

35

TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD

> *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*
>
> MATTHEW 16:24–26

The theocentric principle here was the final judgment of God. Every man faces the final judgment. Compared to the loss of one's soul at this judgment, the gaining of everything that life has to offer is nothing. The issue was sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Free Grace Is Not Cheap

Jesus here warned His disciples that there are no free lunches in life. There is free grace, but it comes at a price. It comes, first and foremost, at the price of the death of Jesus Christ. Redeemed people owe a lifetime service to God through Christ (Rom. 12:1).[2] But this service is insufficient to pay for eternal life. We know this because of the subsequent comparison: all the world could not redeem one man's soul. Anything less than this is also insufficient.

Obviously, these words are not to be interpreted literally. Nobody is asked to take up a literal cross. Perhaps some follower of Jesus was

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

asked to do so under Roman rule, but we are not informed of this. Crucifixion is no longer any nation's means of execution except possibly in rare cases where Christians are executed this way as a symbol of their subordination to an anti-Christian state. In any case, one does not carry a cross through a lifetime of service.

The imagery here is that of a burden that costs a person his life. The cross is heavy. At the end of the journey, it becomes the means of his execution. Taking up the cross means taking up the pre-resurrection life of Christ. It means death to the things of this world. A man carrying a cross is not going to be easily distracted by the things of this world. He has other things on his mind . . . and on his back.

The text warns: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." This is not a call to literal suicide. It is a call for *covenantal death*. The old man is executed. The old Adamic nature is executed. Paul provided a commentary on this passage:

> Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof (Rom. 6:3–12).

To say that we pay a price is to say that we give up something. What do we give up? Our old ways: the sins of the flesh. We forfeit the use of these attributes of Adam. Whatever pleasures or benefits they bring in history, we must give them up. This is the economist's meaning of cost: the most valuable thing foregone. There are no free lunches. We must give up something to gain eternal life. But the basis of our entrance into eternal life is not our payment.

B. The Fearful Exchange

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (v. 26). There is a joke about lawyers. Satan comes to a newly certified lawyer and says: "I will give you the gift of persuasion. You will become a world-famous defense lawyer. I will enable you to get juries to declare guilty criminals innocent, for which these evil men will pay you huge fees. You will become the envy of your peers. All I ask in return is your eternal soul at the end of a life of enormous success." To which the lawyer replies: "What's the catch?"[3]

Jesus warned against this exchange. If gaining the whole world is a bad bargain for the loss of one's soul, then gaining anything less is a worse bargain. This is what present-oriented men do not acknowledge. They either reject the thought of eternal judgment on these terms or else they discount the future cost to such a low level that the exchange seems worth it. This exchange of the eternal in favor of the temporal is the essence of foolishness.

Time offers what appear to be ways out of trouble. There is always an option, a way of escape. This faith is a reflection of an ethical truth: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). But eternity does not possess this characteristic feature of time. In eternity, there is no escape. This is unimaginable to the time-bound sinner who thinks he can find a way not to pay for his sins. There is only one such way: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9–10). But this way of escape places a new perceptual burden on man: his recognition of *the high price of sin*. As the price of sin rises, less of it will be demanded, other things being equal.

The problem is, when sin is involved, other things do not remain equal. *Sin has the characteristic feature of being addictive*. The more you

3. The existence of hundreds of anti-lawyer jokes in the United States indicates a widespread distrust and resentment against lawyers as against no other profession. The public understands that the legal profession offers great wealth to those who pervert the intention of the law, i.e., to be a terror to evil-doers. Lawyers are not penalized professionally for misusing the law in order to get rich by terrorizing the innocent.

get, the more you want. The insatiable nature of sin leads some men into early death. They cannot control their addiction. Sin is like a ratchet upward: one level becomes normal, so new sins are sought out. *But in a redeemed person, the insatiable nature of sin is reversed*. He reaches a level of sinning that he recognizes as self-destructive. He sees the high price of sin. He then demands less of it. In fact, he can create an *ethically positive ratchet*: as he indulges in fewer sins, he finds that his taste for old ones and even new ones is reduced.

Such a transformation runs counter to what economics teaches. Economics teaches us that when the price of something is reduced, more of it is demanded. This is expressed graphically by a demand curve that slopes downward and to the right. Price is expressed on the vertical axis, and quantity is on the horizontal axis.

God's redemption of sinners lowers their eternal price of an individual sin. This is because the redeemed person is not condemned eternally when he sins. Why, then, should he not indulge himself all the more? After all, the price is lower. Answer: because *redemption changes his taste for sin*. In the terminology of graph-addicted economists, his entire demand curve for sin shifts to the left: reduced demand for sin all along the curve.

Paul understood the logic of economics in this application, and he rejected the conclusion. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 5:19–6:2). Other things, such as the demand curve for sin, do not remain equal. The redeemed sinner's taste for sin is reduced.

Redemption increases a man's perception of eternity. It lengthens a man's time perspective. It increases his future orientation. This makes it possible for him to count the cost of his thoughts and actions (Luke 14:28–30).[4] Man always discounts the future. The more distant in the future an expected event, the less it affects a person's decision-making today. The payoff, discounted to the present, is too low, for either benefits or losses. But, if a man discounts eternity's effects to nearly

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press,. 2012), ch. 35.

zero, in the way that he discounts events a century hence, he has made a disastrous miscalculation. He does not grasp how important time is for the outcome in eternity. He compares time to time. He should be comparing time to eternity. The discount that he applies to very distant events is influenced by his knowledge that he will not be here to see the results of his actions. But eternity is different. He will be there to see the results of his actions, and to experience them (Luke 16:23; Rev. 20:14–15).

Conclusion

Men set their priorities in terms of their values and their expectations about the future. Jesus said that our values should reflect the future—specifically, eternity. Any set of values that does not incorporate expectations about eternity must be wrong, He taught. The soul survives beyond the grave. Thus, any cost-benefit analysis in history should include costs or benefits in eternity.

The price of eternal life is sacrificial living in history. Christ's life of complete subordination to God and His undeserved death have set the judicial standard. He definitively paid the price. Taking up the cross and losing one's life for Christ's sake are aspects of the great exchange: a costly eternity vs. a beneficial eternity. Life is the constant exchange of one set of conditions for another. This includes eternal life. One way of life is exchanged for one kind of eternity. This exchange is *definitive* in history: God's judicial imputation to sinners of Christ's righteousness (Rom. 3:24–25; Phil. 3:9). It is also *progressive:* working out one's salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). It is also *final* (Matt. 25; Rev. 20:14–15).

The marketplace of the soul is history. A man cannot buy back his soul. Either it has been bought back by Christ or it cannot be bought back at all. From whom is it bought back? From God, who is sovereign over the souls of men.

36

TRIBUTE MONEY

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented [anticipated] him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

MATTHEW 17:24–27

The theocentric focus of this passage was what we owe to God. The great king of the universe takes tribute from strangers, not from His sons. This is hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Tribute and Sanctions

The Romans imposed their will on the Mediterranean world. They extracted payments from the captive nations. The mark of a captive nation was its requirement to pay tribute. This was not a tax that citizens paid. It was a military exaction. The Roman Empire singled out defeated peoples as tribute payers.

Tribute was common in the ancient world. One benefit of operating an empire was the government's ability to transfer to subject peoples the costs associated with governing them. *They paid for their own*

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

political subordination. The payment of tribute was a way of reminding the victims that they were not part of the ruling class. They were part of a mass of subjects without rights. They were not citizens of a larger commonwealth.

There were ways out from under: a successful revolt, buying one's citizenship, being granted citizenship for special service to Rome, personal escape into another jurisdiction, or the breakdown of the empire from internal causes. Israel attempted the first approach, but this led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple.[2]

Roman rule brought advantages. Rome's navy cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates. Roman roads made transportation and communication easier. Roman law created an international economy. All of this was good for trade. It increased the division of labor and specialization. This increased output per unit of input. People generally got richer as a result of Rome's system of administration. The Pax Romana was in its early stages in Jesus' day—peace that offered many economic opportunities. These benefits were paid for by beneficiaries. When the Pharisees challenged Jesus regarding the payment of tribute, He had them bring him a coin. "Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:19–21).[3] Caesar's government had extended trade to the Roman Empire. A tribute coin, which the denarius was,[4] became the coin of the realm. The coin used for paying taxes was also used to increase trade and wealth.

So, there were positive and negative sanctions associated with the Roman Empire. The positive sanctions were mainly economic. The negative sanctions were mainly political.

B. Born Free

Freedom in Rome's Empire meant Roman citizenship. This gave a person special legal privilege. For example, a Roman citizen could not be physically punished without a trial. This was a mark of civil

2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

3. Chapter 44.

4. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 122–23. (Reprinted by Wipf & Stock, 2008.)

liberty. Paul, who was a Roman citizen, reminded the centurion of this prior to a whipping.

> The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him (Acts 22:24–29).

1. Jesus' Subordination

Jesus told His disciples to pay tribute. He then provided them with a miracle. If they went fishing, they would be able to pay their tribute money. A fish would provide the coin. Furthermore, Jesus said that this payment would be on His behalf, not just theirs. He was announcing that He was under Roman authority. He proved this by submitting to arrest by the agents of Rome. He told Pilate, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt. 26:53–54).

He was the true son, yet He accepted Rome's designation of a stranger. He refused to give offense. He was telling His disciples not to revolt against Rome. This message was lost on the Jews a generation later. It was the church's subordination to persecution in A.D. 64/65 under Nero that gained it separate legal status from Israel. Previously, the special legal status of Israel had protected Christians. Not after A.D. 63.[5] So, when Israel revolted in A.D. 66, the Jews' status as revolutionaries did not extend to the Christians. The Christians' subordination to persecution earlier was what saved them from the Great Tribulation: the destruction of Israel.[6]

The true-born sons of God—sons of the Great King—are required to pay a tithe to God's church.[7] This is not tribute. This is citizenship

5. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996). pp. 48–51.

6. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997).

7. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

money. Their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). The mark of their sonship is the payment of the tithe. Yet they also pay taxes in times of military defeat and tyranny. They do so in order not to give offense to civil rulers.

There is an old slogan, "one rotten apple spoils the barrel." In the New Covenant, this is not the case. The freeborn sons incorrupt the rotten whole. Rome fell to the church, not the other way around. *Evil is far more threatened by good than good is threatened by evil*. This was not the case under the Old Covenant. Israel was separated from the nations by rituals and laws governing land and seed. Egypt's corrupt leaven was a threat to Israel. This is why they celebrated Passover: a week without leaven. But under the New Covenant, the old laws of ritual cleanliness have been replaced by the law of the Lord's Supper, which is open to all who subordinate themselves to Christ. Separation is not based on a threat of corruption through eating. It is based on a promise of incorruption by eating.

2. Salvation's New Birth

The new birth of salvation establishes a man's status as an adopted son of the Great King. This is an important doctrine for citizenship. Christians are citizens of heaven, and they are to work to bring this citizenship down to earth (Phil. 3:20).[8] The Lord's Prayer says, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).[9] Christians are to work for the creation of Christian nations, covenanted formally under the Trinitarian God of the Bible. They are to become citizens of the same kingdom, heavenly and earthly.

If they must pay tribute for a time in order not to give offense to their rulers, this is not to be seen by them as a permanent condition. They are sons of the Great King. His kingdom is forever. They must serve as leaven of righteousness. They pay tribute as strangers today in order to pay taxes as citizens of the holy commonwealth tomorrow. The goal is dominion in history by subordination and loyalty to God's commonwealth. A mark of this loyalty is their acceptance of temporary tribute-paying status.

This means that ethics is more powerful than power. Dominion religion is more powerful than power religion.[10] In the long run, righ-

8. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 6.

9. Chapter 12.

10. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985).

teousness triumphs in history.[11] This is why Christians can afford to be patient. They bear the burden of tribute payment for the sake of a larger program of world conquest. It is not that the pen is mightier than the sword. It is that the word is mightier than the sword—the word of God. Freeborn sons bring the message of *liberation through adoption* to a disinherited world. Men pay tribute to Satan through their sin. Liberation from bondage begins with liberation from sin. Paul wrote: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:16–18). "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom. 6:20–22). Liberation from sin leads to liberation from fear. Paul wrote: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:14–17). "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

C. From Tribute to Taxes

I remember hearing a speaker offer the example of the fish and the coin in defense of the requirement to pay taxes. A tax protester responded: "The fish paid the tax." Clever, but wrong. Once the disciples had the coin in their possession, it was their responsibility to pay tribute. They could have used the coin to buy something rather than pay tribute. That which they might have purchased was their cost of paying tribute. They, not the fish, bore this cost.

Taxes become tribute payments when those who pay them are not part of the household of faith that collects the taxes. The household

11. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997).

of the king was religious. To be a citizen of Rome meant being part of the Roman system of religion—Rome's confession. Citizenship, like sonship, is confessional. When men take an oath of citizenship, they announce their loyalty to a system of ideals, laws, and sanctions. This oath is religious.

Jesus did not tell His disciples not to pay tribute. He told them to pay. Why? Because their presence inside the borders of the Roman Empire was a means of conquest. They would work to spread the confession of adopted sonship. As more people confessed faith in God's son, they would threaten the basis of Rome's confession. The new confession would undermine Rome's confession, which ceased in the fourth century with the death of the last pagan emperor, Julian the Apostate, in 363. The freeborn sons of God inherited the kingdom of Rome. This was an aspect of "thy kingdom come." From that time on, they ceased to be tributaries. They became citizens. They continued to call this kingdom Rome, but Romulus would not have recognized it. Neither would Pontius Pilate.

Citizens can protest the level of taxation in a way that noncitizens cannot. Citizens are part of the oath-bound civil covenant. In a democracy or a republic, they can bring political sanctions against their rulers. What they pay may resemble tribute, but the confession and the sanctions indicate that they are paying taxes. They are part of the household of the national faith.

Conclusion

Jesus set forth a principle of dominion: do not give offense to those foreigners who rule over you. They have a rival confession. This confession can be undermined through preaching and obedience to God, which involves outward obedience to civil rulers. It can be transformed. The basis of this transformation is not revolutionary action. Rather, it is confessional and ethical: word and deed evangelism.

Jesus here established a program of conquest: *dominion by subordination*. He established priorities: *the payment of tribute* rather than giving offense by revolutionary action. The church's acceptance of these political priorities is what saved it from the Great Tribulation in A.D. 70.

The top priority here was peace. By paying tribute, His disciples avoided a confrontation with Rome. This gained time for the work of evangelism. Evangelism eventually undermined Rome's confession. Rome was baptized in the fourth century, as the Great Commission mandates (Matt. 28:19).

37

HIERARCHY OF INDEBTEDNESS

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

MATTHEW 18:23–30

The theocentric focus of this passage was God, the money-lender. He sets the model for forgiveness and for condemnation. The issue was subordination, point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. The Unforgiving Steward

This parable is famous for its comparison of hell with debtors' prison. But the economic principle of this parable is not immediately apparent. This much is clear: the parable has to do with obligations owed, large and small. What is generally not understood is the hierarchy of debt.

A servant who owed a gigantic amount to his master was conditionally forgiven of this debt by his master. The *judicial conditionality*

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

of salvation is clearly taught in this passage. The master has the right to revoke the debt release. He did revoke it. The steward was cast into prison until he should pay the debt in full. Then what kind of salvation is under discussion here? The *salvation of common grace*: the salvation granted to mankind apart from a complete and final repayment of the debt owed to God.

The servant then demanded the immediate repayment of a comparatively tiny amount from a poor debtor, and when the poor man could not pay, the steward had him thrown into debtors' prison. Then the master revoked his mercy and delivered the servant to debtors' prison. "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:32–35).[2]

If we take this parable as a representation of God's judicial relationship with fallen man, we must conclude that God's forgiveness of a man's debts is conditional.[3] These conditions are two-fold. First, a man's acceptance of Christ's payment to God on his behalf. Second, his grant of the same debt-free status to those who owe him anything beyond their ability to repay. The neighbor, according to the parable of the Good Samaritan, is that person who walks the same road we do who has been harmed along the way through no fault of his own (Luke 10:30–37).[4] When I help him, I should not insist on immediate repayment if it threatens his ability to perform his work and eventually to repay the debt.

Why should this be true? Because the debt-credit relationship is inescapably hierarchical. The borrower is servant to the lender (Prov. 22:7). When God grants me credit, and I in turn grant someone else credit, that person has become God's servant through me. This is why biblical law recommends that God's people become creditors to covenant-breakers, but not become debtors to them (Deut. 28:12).[5]

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2. Chapter 37.

3. Ray R. Sutton, "Whose Conditions for Charity?" *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, ed. Gary North (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 9.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Geoirgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 21.

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 70.

What commentators rarely (if ever) mention is this: *the poor debtor still owed the money to the rich master*. The steward had merely served as an economic and legal middleman—a representative of the master. The steward had advanced the person money that did not belong to the steward; it had been borrowed from the master. The steward had legal control over the money *temporarily*; he did not own it. This is the definition of all stewardship: temporary legal control over the use of another person's asset. This leads to an important conclusion: *the master's legal annulment of the debt owed to him by the steward was therefore also a legal annulment of the debts of all debtors under the steward's economic authority*. In other words, the obligation was hierarchical: from the poor man to the master through the steward.

Why was the steward unjust? His sin was more than ethical injustice to a poor person; it was judicial rebellion against the master. By trying to collect payment from the poor man, the steward was saying: "I am no longer a middleman, now that my debt has been forgiven. I am now the exclusive owner of assets. The credit that I extended with borrowed money is still owed to me irrespective of my previous obligations. I am therefore no longer a steward. I am no longer under a hierarchy. I can now collect what is lawfully mine from those who are under me." His refusal to cancel the debt that *had been owed to the master through the steward's lending* was a rebellious declaration of independence. He became a thief and a usurper, for he was trying to collect for his own account assets that, economically speaking, had belonged to the master. He was trying to profit from the master's mercy. He refused to acknowledge the *economics of forgiveness*: the master had implicitly released the poor man from his debt, which had been owed to the master by way of the servant, the day the master released his steward from his obligation. The unjust steward refused to acknowledge the legality of this indirect (representative) release. He held to the letter of the law—the terms of the original debt contract—rather than to the underlying economics of the transaction: hierarchical representation and lawful subordination. So, the master reimposed the original debt in order to remind the steward that he was still nothing but a steward, that he was still under the master's lawful authority.

However, by consigning the unjust steward to prison, *the master was implicitly reimposing the debt on the poor man*. The master in the parable did not order the release of the poor man. Why not? Because such a unilateral act of debt release would have been theft: stealing from the steward, i.e., taking away an asset that the steward could use

to repay his debt. The master could forgive the poor debtor only by forgiving the steward's debt by the same amount. The steward's wife or heirs were legally empowered to collect everything owed to him in a vain attempt to pay off the master.

The day of reckoning—an accounting concept—had come for both the steward and the poor debtor. Time had run out for both of them. Their debt pyramid had toppled. The hierarchy of debt repayment would now be felt up and down the chain of obligations. Those foolish enough to have indebted themselves would now be reminded of the hierarchical nature of debt. The master had at last pressed his lawful claims. *By indebting himself to an unjust steward, the poor man brought the master's judgment on his own head*. Covenant-keepers should learn this lesson well: do not become indebted to covenant-breakers. "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (Deut. 28:43–44).[6] When God periodically collects His debts from covenant-breakers in history, all those obligated to them or dependent on them feel the economic pain, including covenant-keepers. Anyone who doubts this should consider carefully what happens to debtors and everyone who sells goods and services to debtors during a deflationary economic depression. Of course, if the deflation is so severe that no one can pay, then the debtor escapes in a universal moratorium on repayment.

B. Representative Forgiveness

There was only one reasonable hope for the unjust steward: his kinsman-redeemer. Legally, he was still the head of his household, but economically his kinsman-redeemer was in authority. Only if someone possessing legitimate authority would show mercy on his behalf could he escape. There were only two ways for the kinsman-redeemer to help: (1) pay off the debt; (2) offer to replace the steward in prison. This much is sure: the poor debtor's fate was not in his own hands. He required mercy to escape: from the master or from his kinsman-redeemer.

When God granted the grace of additional time to fallen mankind, He thereby also granted the grace of time to the creation, which was (and remains) under man's lawful authority. The covenant's hierarchical authority structure remained (and remains) in place. Fallen man

6. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 70.

still owes the restitution payment to God; nature is still under God's authority through man, and therefore is under God's curse on man (Rom. 8:19–22).[7] Fallen man is told to treat those under his authority with mercy analogous to the mercy shown by God to fallen man. What is the evidence of God's mercy? A system of representative blood sacrifice.

1. Animal Sacrifices

Why did God require animal sacrifices? What had the animals done to deserve this? Biblically, the answer is simple: they fell with their commander, Adam. Their legal representative fell, and they came under a curse. This is why certain animals could serve as sacrificial offerings acceptable to God. The animal had to be slain before it was placed on the altar. This symbolized the death of a cursed being, fallen man. After death comes fire with salt.[8] The sacrifice announced symbolically: "Either the dead animal roasts in history or else the dead sinner roasts in eternity." In order to preserve man's relationship with God, man must offer sacrifice. Old Covenant man had to offer animal sacrifices. These sacrifices also preserved the animal world's relationship with God. The sacrificed animals represented both the animal world and fallen man's world.

The animals came under God's judgment when Adam did. When God annulled the debts of all those who will ever come representatively under the debt protection of His son Jesus Christ, He also annulled the sacrificial system that had previously governed His set-apart covenant people. Animals today need no representative sacrifices by other animals, since their debts, like the debts of God's covenant people, have been paid representatively by Jesus Christ. When covenant-keeping men's debts were forgiven, so were the debts of the animal world, debts that had been paid representatively from Abel's day by the sacrifice of certain animals. This debt cancellation took place definitively with the crucifixion of Christ and finally with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

There can be no mercy without sacrifice. God's mercy to mankind as a whole is demonstrated in his willingness to sacrifice His son, a perfect man.[9] Men's mercy to the animal kingdom as a whole under

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

8. Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; Mark 9:47–49.

9. Jesus did not die to save all men from hell, but His death provided the legal basis of the gift of life in history: common grace. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 1.

the Mosaic system was demonstrated by the Israelites' willingness to sacrifice their own blemish-free animals. The fact that God was willing to sacrifice His son testifies to His protection of mankind. Similarly, the Israelites' willingness to sacrifice their most valuable animals testified to their hierarchical obligation to protect the creation. *God's required sacrifices were testimonies to His mercy*. When men refuse to offer God's mandatory sacrifices, they become progressively merciless.[10] In the New Covenant, the blood sacrifices are no more. There is only one sacrifice: the death of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:12). But all men are required by God to acknowledge this sacrifice: verbally, ritually, ethically, and financially, i.e., the tithe.

2. Deferred Payment

Man's debt to God was not forgiven under the Old Covenant economy; its repayment was only deferred. In a sense, the sacrifices could at most meet the required "interest payments" to God; they did not repay the principal. Analogously, whenever Israel quit paying because of her rebellion, these missed payments were added to the principal owed. Israel's debt to God grew ever-larger.[11] Finally, in A.D. 70, God called in the debt.[12] Israel went bankrupt publicly. "Forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:12) is no idle phrase. The presence of the required sacrifices in the Mosaic economy testified to the continuing presence of the debt in God's account books, and also to each man's need to repay God in the future. The cosmic Creditor will eventually demand repayment of everything owed to Him. On that final day of reckoning, every person will have to produce one of two things: sufficient funds to repay his debt (impossible) or evidence that he had already accepted the generosity of the Kinsman-Redeemer who had repaid his debt. At the final judgment, the books are forever closed. So is the exit from the ultimate debtor's prison.

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10. The animism and the pantheism of the modern ecology movement are denials of the God of the Bible and His required system of sacrifice. If this movement's stipulations are enforced by international civil law, we can expect tyranny on an international scale. Men will seek to overturn the Bible's hierarchical system: God > man > nature. Mankind will be sacrificed to nature. For a defense of just this sort of sacrifice, see Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989).

11. In real estate, this is called a *backward-walking mortgage*: the missed monthly mortgage payment is added to the principal owed, so the subsequent payments must be larger. The national debt of the United States government in 2012 is well advanced into a backward-walking phase. The deficit is running $1.3 trillion a year. (The median price for a house was $70,000.)

12. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997); Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

By forgiving a sin against us, we symbolically and legally forgive *a debt owed to God* through us. This is why one version of the Lord's prayer says "forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:4), while the parallel in Matthew (the former tax collector) says "forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:12).[13] By extending forgiveness as God's representative agents, we show God's mercy to God's debtors in God's name: "as we forgive our debtors." Offering up a scarce economic resource to God as a sacrificial offering is economically the same as forgiving a debt legally owed to us.

Consider the words of Jesus, the long-awaited representative who offered up Himself to God as a holy sacrifice: the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer. He prayed to God from the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Luke 23:34). He legally annulled this horrendous sin for those who had truly acted out of ignorance—most obviously, the Roman guards who gambled for His clothing. His death and His words annulled *these specific debts* to God the Father. These men had sinned against God the Father by sinning against Jesus. When He forgave them, He did so as the judicial victim. The principle of victim's rights allows such forgiveness.[14] He thereby also forgave them on His Father's account, as God's legal heir and representative agent.

The forfeited value of a sacrifice made to God symbolizes two things: (1) God's payment of His own Son, the Messiah, and (2) the patience that we have shown to those who had sinned against us. We are stewards, not owners. When we forgive others, we offer up a sacrifice to God: extending grace to sinners by forfeiting whatever they legally owed to us.[15] Of course, we are gaining heavenly resources by doing this. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).[16]

13. Protestant churches that place heavy emphasis on liturgy (i.e., sacrifice-oriented) often pray "forgive us our trespasses." This is closest to the covenantal focus of Leviticus: boundaries and their violation.

14. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), Appendix M.

15. We can still lawfully ask for economic restitution, but we can also forgive this payment or any penalty payment.

16. Chapter 13.

C. Seek Nothing in Return

God has forgiven us. We are to forgive others. This has to do with sin. But does it include debt? Are we literally to forgive all debts owed to us? In another passage, Jesus indicated that this is the case. "For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:32–35).

This is a hard saying: hard to understand and hard to obey. When we deposit money in a bank, we lend to the bank. The bank lends to others. Are we never to get our money back? The parable of the talents indicates otherwise. The steward who buried his coin was rebuked by the master. "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury" (Matt. 25:27).[17] The steward was not told to lend the master's money to the bankers and then forgive the debt. He was told that he should have collected interest on the master's behalf. Then what did Jesus mean, "lend, hoping for nothing again"?

He meant that we are to make charity loans to desperate people for God's sake, not our own. In the Mosaic Covenant, interest payments on such charitable loans to brothers in the covenant was prohibited (Ex. 22:25).[18] The New Covenant has broadened this classification. Those outside the confessional brotherhood are entitled to interest-free loans and the forgiveness of debt in a crisis.

Then who has enough money to give money to all of those in need? Only God. A human lender will run out of money very fast: more demand at zero price than supply. If every person with money must loan to every poor man without money, the debt market will disappear fast. If poverty constitutes a moral claim on capital, there will soon be no capital. Without capital, poverty will become universal. Did Jesus call for universal poverty? No. God gives us capital; we are supposed to increase it.

If capital is to be preserved and increased, the lender will have to allocate his money based on considerations other than the mere pov-

17. Chapter 47.
18. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49.

erty of the borrower. But he will also have to allocate it based on considerations other than an interest return. He will have to make judgments about people's reasons for needing a loan and their ability to put the assets to productive use. In short, *he must substitute moral evaluation for interest rate considerations*. The righteous poor man is more deserving than the unrighteous poor man. He is also more likely to repay the principal. But interest is still prohibited. The Mosaic law on this point has not been annulled. On the contrary, it has been broadened to include those outside the covenant.

God requires us to increase the capital that He has given us. That which we use as our investment capital is to be expanded, and expanded greatly. But we must do this only on one assumption: *we are acting on God's behalf*. If we act autonomously, we sin. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).[19] In our business dealings, we are to be wise investors who seek a high return: ten talents from five, four from two. But we are not to abandon mercy. When someone in our debt falls into arrears through no fault of his own and asks for more time, we are to honor this request. Our success as producers is to increase our success as givers.

A huge sum of money can be given away systematically only through the establishment of a bureaucracy. This usually leads to the capture of the capital by salaried, formally educated bureaucrats who are hostile to the free market that led to its creation. The richest men in early twentieth-century America—John D. Rockefeller, Sr., Andrew Carnegie, and Henry Ford—set up charitable foundations that were immediately captured by humanists who had an anti-free market agenda. Many were lawyers, and they wanted economic control through the state, not free market competition. Rare is the donor who practices charity throughout his years as an accumulator of capital.[20] It takes practice to give money away. This is why rich men rarely succeed as donors. They know how to amass capital; they have no practice in giving it away.

19. Chapter 13.

20. The best example I know of is William Volker, who created the Volker charities. He tithed from the age of 12. See Herbert Cornuelle, *Mr. Anonymous: The Story of William Volker* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1951). Volker's money led to the creation of many libertarian organizations, including the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE). I was employed by the Volker Fund in the summer of 1963 and by FEE in 1971–73.

D. The Debt Pyramid

1. Charitable Loans

The charitable loan is a top-down loan. It is extended from the richer to the less rich. Those with greater knowledge of money and how to accumulate it make loans to those with less knowledge. The owners of capital make risk calculations, knowing that they may not be repaid. They do not depend on income derived from these extensions of charitable debt. In fact, the Bible tells them not to become dependent on income from charitable debt: no interest rate.[21] Those with greater economic authority are in control of the debt structure. They extend credit in the full knowledge that they are dealing with subordinates who possess less knowledge about wealth and its accumulation.

The debt pyramid of the parable is a top-down structure. The rich man had lent a great deal of money to the steward. He was rich enough to forgive the steward. He thereby granted a large gift to the steward. But the steward refused to extend the same mercy to the poor man whose money was not enough to make a difference to the steward.

Had the steward extended credit to other poor people? Had he become a money-lender to the poor? Was he seeking an interest return from charitable loans? This is what seems to be the case. He had not made a business loan to one of his peers. He had not become an investor in some profit-seeking venture. He had lent money to a poor man. Not only was he not to expect an interest return, he was to lend, hoping nothing in return, Jesus warned elsewhere. He had no money of his own. He was too deeply in debt to his master. He was technically bankrupt. After the master revoked the gift and called in the loan, he was legally bankrupt. This parable warns that this is the condition of every man in relation to God: technical bankruptcy leading to legal bankruptcy apart from the intervention of the kinsman-redeemer (Lev. 25:23–24).[22]

2. Business Loans

The charitable loan is a top-down loan. A business loan in the modern economy is different. First, the huge accumulation of capital in the modern world has been made possible by the loans and

21. North, *Tools of Dominion*, ch. 23.

22. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 28:B.

investments of millions of people. While Pareto's 20-80 wealth distribution predominates everywhere, it is also true that middle-class people make investments in pension funds that in turn make loans to large companies, customers, and anyone else who promises to repay and whose credit worthiness is acceptable. Pension funds also make investments. Investors are either dependent on income from these loans or will be upon retirement.

Capitalism's loans are commercial endeavors. Millions of people enter the credit markets in search of a positive return. Millions of other people borrow money. Millions of lenders (e.g., bank account depositors, pension fund owners) are also debtors (e.g., owners of mortgaged homes). The web of debt envelops the whole economy, which in turn becomes dependent on contractual repayment. This web is complex beyond calculation. The survival of a high-division-of-labor society is dependent on the permanent maintenance of this credit-debt structure. If the web fails through widespread default, the society fails. The division of labor contracts. Men's income disappears.

Second, the modern debt pyramid is based on fractional reserve banking. The banking system makes a promise to lenders: they may withdraw their funds at any time. But if even a small percentage of depositors do this in the absence of deposits made by others, the banking system faces a crisis. It has to call in loans. Businesses cannot pay off these loans. The banks stop making new loans. A wave of bankruptcies spreads through the economy. This produces a recession. It can produce a depression. Then the central bank steps in any buys assets in order to reinflate the money supply. A new wave of inflation and debt begins.

In a debt-based society, the failure of repayment at the bottom—the banks—threatens the entire capital structure. From bottom to top, the inverted pyramid of debt collapses. Contracts written in terms of the older economic conditions become unenforceable. The enforcement of debt contracts leads only to universal bankruptcy. This, of course, reflects fallen man's legal condition before God.

The more extensive the economy's reliance on debt, the more devastating the collapse. The more widespread the use of money substitutes, the more deflationary the collapse. The more deflationary the collapse, the greater the shrinking of the division of labor. Society's wealth disappears when the economic output provided by the division of labor disappears. When contracts become unenforceable in

the courts, the rule of law disappears if men are not self-governed and merciful.

Conclusion

The parable of the unjust steward reveals the reason why we are required by God to forgive others: we are forgiven by God. Their sins against us are ultimately sins against God. We are representatives of God, made in His image and adopted by His grace. This is point two of the biblical covenant model: representation. Point two also includes hierarchy. When we forgive the sinner in history for the sin, God forgives him in history for the sin. (We do not have the authority to forgive him in eternity.) If we receive forgiveness from God and then refuse to forgive, we are insisting that the unforgiven sinner owes his debt to us rather than to God. We thereby act on our own behalf, as if we had not been representatives of God. We insist on our autonomy.

Mercy is a positive sanction, but it implies a negative sanction. God's common grace in history implies a negative future sanction for continued disobedience. That is the message of this parable. The debtor's obligation accumulates. The threat of a demand for repayment hangs over him. Paul cited Proverbs 25:21–22: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20).[23] That is why we are to pray, "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).

The top priority in this parable is to obtain and retain our judicial status as forgiven sinners. This requires our acceptance of others who need forgiveness of debts of all kinds, including money. God has extended His kingdom in history through us. We have made loans, placing others in our debt. But this places them in God's debt. He forgives us; therefore, as His agents, we are to forgive those who owe God through us.

Does God's spiritual forgiveness mandate our economic forgiveness? If so, this would destroy all commercial lending. It would make impossible the allocation of risk to those entrepreneurs who want varying degrees of it, which is what commercial loans do. The text indicates that the forgiveness is like for like: God forgives us spiritually; we forgive others spiritually. If God forgives us an economic debt, such as an unpaid vow, then we are to do the same.

23. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 10.

When we lend to those in need, our priority should not be economic profit. Someone has fallen on hard times. We help him now, so that others, by God's grace, will help us if this ever happens to us. Lending to the poor is like an insurance policy. But the context of this passage is desperate need, not consumer lending or commercial lending. It is the kind of relationship we have with God. He is not our partner; He is our master. In our relations with subordinates, we are to show mercy because God has shown mercy to us.

38

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

MATTHEW 19:16–26

This is commonly referred to as the story of the rich young ruler. He was young (Matt. 19:20). He was a ruler (Luke 18:18).

The theocentric principle here is God's criteria for entry into the kingdom of heaven. This was the issue of sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 4.

A. Access to Eternal Life

God has established standards of entry into His kingdom. The Ten Commandments are the summary of these standards, Jesus told the enquirer. But there is another barrier to entry: faith in God rather than faith in riches. The previous section had dealt with the same theme: entry into the kingdom. Men must become as little children, Jesus said. That is, they must trust God with the same confidence that a child trusts his father. In His answer to the enquirer, Jesus amplified this principle. Those who trust in money have transgressed one of the standards of entry. They have substituted a rival faith.

The young man was a ruler (Luke 18:18). He understood something of the doctrine of the resurrection. He sought eternal life. Jesus then referred to the kingdom of heaven. The entry into eternal life takes place in history. The kingdom of heaven must have manifestations in history. What men do or fail to do in history, Christ implied, determines their inheritance.

Can men earn their way into heaven? The young man thought so: he had kept the commandments. Jesus showed him that he had more to do: sell his goods and give them to the poor. But this seems to make access to heaven a matter of good works. He implied that the young man had not done enough by keeping the commandments. He had to do more. Taken at face value, this passage teaches works religion: man can earn his salvation. Such a view of salvation is antithetical to biblical religion. Then why did Jesus not verbally challenge the man to rethink his religion? Why did He imply that the man could buy his way into heaven? Why did He tell the man to give away his money to the poor? Was this what is always required of those who would follow Jesus?

B. Trust Not in Riches

What was Jesus really telling this man? The parallel passage in Mark makes Jesus' position clearer: "And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24). David had said something similar a thousand years earlier: "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Ps. 49:5–7).[2]

2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas,

Jesus returned to this theme repeatedly in His parables and His dealings with rich men. Solomon had, too. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).[3] The rich man trusts in his power to get wealth. He trusts in the creation. Moses warned against this: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).[4] This is the sin of autonomy. It is the belief that man is the primary source of wealth.[5] It is also the belief that this wealth is the coin of the realm in God's kingdom. But it isn't. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).[6]

The lure of wealth is a powerful lure. Wealth seems to offer to man the ability to buy the good things of life. Money is the most marketable commodity. It seems to be a surrogate for wealth. This outlook proclaims: "Anything can be bought; every man has his price." Jesus warned that this is a false premise. So did David: "For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever" (Ps. 49:8).

The enquirer had not understood Jesus' warning about the worship of God rather than mammon. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).[7] The enquirer had not examined his own soul. He had not seen clearly regarding his faith. He still trusted in his riches.

What did his wealth buy him that was worth access to God's kingdom? Wealth can buy many things: luxury, safety, fame, deference by others. But all of these are as fleeting as riches. Remove the wealth, and everything that wealth had bought disappears. *Mammon is a fickle god.* It leaves without warning, taking with it all that it had previously distributed.

C. Give to the Poor

"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow

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Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 54.

3. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012, ch. 54.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 202), ch. 21.

5. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

6. Chapter 35.

7. Chapter 14.

me" (v. 21). Jesus called this would-be disciple to a complete rejection of his former way of life. Why? Does He call all men to the same rejection? If not, why not?

He told the man to sell his wealth and give the money to the poor. But, to do this, he had to sell his goods to someone. His wealth was not to be burnt on a pyre; it was to be exchanged for a more liquid asset: money. Money can be handed out in discrete units, a little at a time. *The rich young man was to learn how to give money away*. Then he was to follow Jesus—not before.

This was a *two-fold transfer of wealth*: to those who bought it for money and to those who received the money. The rich young ruler was to become a *middleman* in the transfer of wealth. The more money he received from the sale of his wealth, the more money he could give away. He was to negotiate a top price from the buyers, and he was then to become a wise giver. *He was to become more skilled as an administrator of capital*. He was to put it to better use: service to God.

Others were allowed to buy his wealth. Did this mean that Jesus was condemning the buyers to eternal torment? Is wealth illegitimate? No. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[8] The question, then, is the context in which the wealth is held: man's or God's. *The theological issue is theonomy vs. autonomy*. To whose use is the wealth to be put? Does the owner see himself as a steward of God?

The rich young ruler had a problem. He was at a turning point in his life. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was held by means of a legal framework. He was under the authority of Rome. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was no safer than this hierarchy. A generation later, Rome would crush Israel's political revolt. Most wealth owned by Jews would be destroyed by war and their subsequent dispersion by Rome. Unless he died young, he lived to see this great destruction of wealth. Mammon cannot be safely trusted.

The young man was beguiled by his possessions. Jesus offered him a pathway to clarity regarding his priorities, but he went away troubled.

Jesus asked him to become poor. Wandering around Judea with a group of unemployed disciples was not a way of life preferred by most rich men. Matthew-Levi was an exception, but there were not

8. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

many.[9] Jesus called the young man into poverty as a way into the kingdom of God. This man's priorities were arranged differently from those required for faithful service in an era of definitive covenantal transition. He did not understand the times.

D. Hierarchies of Faith

"Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (vv. 23–24). This indicates that a rich man is rare in the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven operates in history. We enter it in history.

The disciples replied: "Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." Why did they ask this? There are few rich people in any population; Pareto's wealth-distribution curve assures this. If it didn't, the bell-shaped curve would. Jesus said more than once, "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 20:16;[10] 22:14). This was not a startling doctrine for Jews. (There were no gentiles in the kingdom during Jesus' ministry.) Why should the disciples ask, "Who then can be saved?" Just because a rich man cannot be saved, why should this raise any question about most men?

Jews expected victory in history. They did not believe they would be under foreign domination forever. They had read Deuteronomy 28:

> Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways" (Deut. 28:4–9).[11]

They expected earthly rewards at some future time. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit

9. Chapter 21.
10. Chapter 40.
11. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

the earth" (Ps. 37:9). Yet here was Jesus telling them that these blessings would constitute a threat to Israel's salvation. How could this be?

Jesus answered that, with God, all things are possible. That is, such salvation is abnormal but possible. Jesus' point was clear: wealth is a great temptation. *Those who get wealthy risk being snared by the doctrine of autonomy*. The Old Covenant warned the rich man not to take advantage of the poor or to imagine that he was beyond the circumstances that afflict them.

Jesus' answer indicated that wealth is a snare. Proverbs had said the same thing. "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8–9).[12]

Autonomy's lure is strong. Those who possess any special advantage that provides them with a barrier against life's common burdens are tempted to regard themselves as beyond God's negative sanctions. These advantages include wealth, power, beauty, and health. *But wealth is the most universally sought-after advantage, for it offers the broadest range of immunities life's common burdens*. Of course, it adds new burdens. With an increase in the number of choices (wealth) comes an increase in responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).[13]

The message is clear: we should not expect to see many rich people subordinating themselves to God through the gospel. The rich are not willing to pay the price, namely, a transfer of their faith from wealth to Christ. Wealth seems to be under their control; Christ isn't. Wealth extends their power; faith in Christ extends God's dominion. They appear to be at the top of a hierarchy of wealth; not so with the kingdom of God. The rich man prefers to be at the top.

E. Continuity and Discontinuity in Jesus' Teachings

Jesus did not break with the Old Covenant's view of wealth and its inherent risks. *What made His teaching different was His lack of emphasis on the covenantal basis of corporate wealth*. There is not much in His teaching about the relationship between covenant-keeping and a society's accumulation of wealth. There are only occasional reconfirmations of the Old Covenant's system of corporate sanctions. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). This cites

12. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

13. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

Psalm 37:11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." *Jesus placed most of His emphasis on the idea of wealth as a snare to the individual rather than as a tool of dominion*. There is no doubt that this New Testament emphasis is overwhelmingly promotes the idea of great wealth as a risk to the soul.

There is nothing in the New Testament that indicates that economic growth as a goal for society is wrong. There is nothing wrong with reducing the number of poor people by increasing their productivity. Capital accumulation increases men's productivity. Better tools make men more productive. Personal thrift increases capital accumulation. Men have discovered no better way to increase the supply of capital than to allow investors to reap the fruits of their investments. The goal of greater personal wealth is the lure that increases per capita investment in a society. That which is dangerous to the soul—the quest for wealth—is also what reduces the number of poor as well as their degree of poverty. Not charity but thrift and wise investing are the secret of reduced poverty in society. *This crucial fact is not taught in the New Testament*. It is implied in the Old Testament, however, which teaches the legal and moral right of private ownership and the legitimacy of wealth. *When obeyed, the legal framework of the Mosaic Covenant will produce a capitalistic social order.*[14]

There are those who argue that Jesus did not adopt Old Testament standards. In fact, most Christians affirm this. But they affirm it selectively. At some point, they are forced to admit that sometimes He assumed the continuity of Mosaic standards. For example, conservatives[15] insist that Jesus was not opposed to the free market, and was even favorable to it. Yet they also insist that He did not affirm a theocratic system of civil government, or any other political system. Liberals[16] insist that He opposed both the free market and theocratic civil government. Trapped between the two are pietistic Christians who say that Jesus was indifferent to social issues; He was concerned only with personal salvation. They can appeal to the obvious fact that He was as silent on the free market social order as He was on theocratic civil government. Why this silence? Because He implicitly accepted both? Because He implicitly opposed both? Because He implicitly accepted one but not the other? Or because He was indifferent to both?

14. This is the most important conclusion of the 31 volumes in this commentary.
15. Those in the Scottish Whig tradition by way of Edmund Burke.
16. Those in the French Revolutionary tradition.

Theonomists assume covenantal continuity in the absence of specific annulments or a change based on the end of Israel's status as the Promised Land of the priestly nation.[17] So, theonomists insist that *Jesus accepted both the free market and theocratic civil government*, since the Mosaic Covenant mandated both, and there is nothing in the New Covenant that annuls either institutional arrangement. He did not break with Moses on either point. His emphasis on the spiritual danger of wealth also did not break with Moses. He just skipped over the legacy of the Old Covenant that affirmed the legitimacy of great wealth, with Abraham and Job as leading examples. This was a matter of emphasis. *The temporal emphases of the two testaments are different*. This does not mean that the testaments are in opposition. For instance, the New Testament teaches the doctrine of the resurrection; the Old Covenant mentions it: Daniel 13:1–3; Job 19:25–27. The two covenants are not in opposition regarding the resurrection. Jesus was far more concerned with the doctrine of the resurrection than the doctrine of economic growth.

The *personal* economic goal recommended by the Old Testament was middle-class wealth (Prov. 30:8–9).[18] There is nothing in the New Testament that would call this goal into question. Paul wrote, citing the account of the manna (Ex. 16:18): "As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack" (II Cor. 8:15).[19] But, in a world without manna from heaven, *the output sufficient to fill most men's stomachs will make some men rich*. Like the poor, Pareto's curve is with us always. *Output sufficient to feed all men will make some men very rich*. The question is: What will these rich men do with their wealth? Share it? Accumulate more of it? The rich young ruler had his answer straight from Jesus. He went away troubled.

F. Jesus' Priorities

The rich young ruler had a problem with the content of his faith. He trusted in what he thought he could do and had always done: keep all of God's commandments. Jesus showed him that his faith was in himself and therefore defective. His faith was leading him to eternal

17. Seed laws, land laws, and priestly laws. See Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion.

18. North, *God's Success Manual*, ch. 85.

19. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

death. His law-keeping and his wealth had become his high walls. By challenging him to tear down the second of these two walls, Jesus forced him to reconsider the content of his faith. His problem was not his good works or his wealth; his problem was his belief in the spiritual efficacy of works religion. He could not earn eternal life.

To show to him how wrong he was, Jesus went to the heart of his faith: his wealth. He was a follower of mammon. What he had to do in order to gain eternal life was beyond his ability. What all men have to do to gain eternal life is beyond their ability. It is the task of the evangelist to identify whatever it is that an anxious enquirer cannot do or will not do for the sake of the prize: the good work that is just too much for him, the wall that he cannot climb over. The evangelist must then confront the enquirer with the existence of this wall, which is a barrier in between him and the eternal prize. Then the enquirer may be ready to hear the correct answer: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). How does a man deny himself? By affirming faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer: "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

Jesus placed the attainment of personal wealth very low on any man's list of priorities—far lower than generosity to the poor. He placed charity to the poor as the basis of attaining wealth (Luke 6:38).[20] He also did not place national per capita economic growth on the list. Yet the second condition, economic growth, follows from the first: the attainment of riches by the few. Without rich men's willingness to save money and invest it in their quest for wealth, there can be no widespread reduction in poverty: *insufficient per capita capital*.

The third point follows from the first two. He emphasized personal charity, which ameliorates individual cases of poverty but does not automatically solve the problem of widespread poverty. Only economic growth does this, but economic growth is the product of systematic investing by the richest 20% of the population. Many religions emphasize charity, but only in the West, where Christianity and especially Calvinist theology laid its economic foundations, has a two centuries-long period of compound economic growth occurred.[21]

20. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 11.

21. Whether it can continue in the face of widespread apostasy, increasing debauchery, and legalized abortion remains to be seen.

Compared to eternal life, economic growth is a pale sanction, but this does not deny the moral legitimacy of economic growth. *Economic growth need not be a negative sanction*. John Wesley's refrain is valid: "Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can."[22] It was this outlook that moved Methodists in England and the United States out of grinding poverty into middle-class respectability in a little over a century, 1740 to 1860. But, by 1900, Methodist bishops had adopted theological liberalism. The history of the twentieth-century mainline denominations in the United States is evidence of the truth of Christ's warning to the rich young ruler. Better to be a Methodist layman in a wretched hut in 1740 than a Methodist theologian in a wretched seminary in the early twenty-first century.

The New Testament does not mention any corporate economic goal. The economic goal of the Old Testament was middle-class comfort for the covenanted nation. *Middle-class comfort for the masses takes generations of compound economic growth*. This was not achieved in any society until the twentieth century, during which Western Christianity went into spiritual decline.

Conclusion

The rich young ruler had a problem with the content of his faith. He trusted in what he thought he could do and had always done: keep all of God's commandments. Jesus showed him that his faith was in himself and therefore defective. His faith was leading him to eternal death. *His law-keeping and his wealth had become his high walls*. By challenging him to tear down the second of these two walls, Jesus challenged him to reconsider the content of his faith. The young man's problem was not his good works or his wealth; *his problem was his belief in the spiritual efficacy of works righteousness*. He could not earn eternal life.

To show to him how wrong he was, Jesus went to the heart of his faith: his wealth. He was a disciple of mammon. What he had to do in order to gain eternal life was beyond his ability. What all men have to do to gain eternal life is beyond their ability. It is the task of the evangelist to identify whatever it is that an anxious enquirer cannot do or will not do for the sake of the prize: the good work that is just too much for him, the wall that he cannot climb over. The evangelist must then confront the enquirer with the existence of this wall, which

22. Sermon 50 (1744): "The Use of Money."

is a barrier in between him and the eternal prize. Then the enquirer may be ready to hear the correct answer: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). How does a man deny himself? By affirming his faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer: "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

The New Testament is hostile to the quest for tangible riches. Yet it is favorable, as is the Old Testament, to middle-class living. But to attain middle-class comfort for the masses, a few people will get rich. *Like the poor, the rich we shall always have with us.* But if the way to riches is by serving paying customers, as it is under free market capitalism, then *the greater the wealth of the rich minority, the less grinding will be the poverty of the poor* (Luke 8:18).[23] The problem is, when the poor have become less poor because wealth-seeking entrepreneurs have been allowed to get exceedingly rich, both the rich and the poor can fall into the trap: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth."[24]

Verses 23 and 24 teach that rich men do not often enter the kingdom. But Proverbs 13:22 teaches that the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just. This is a matter of inheritance. So, rich men will at some point in history be covenant-keepers. How can these passages be reconciled? Did Jesus annul Proverbs 13:22? The amillennialist must argue that He did. After all, the meek will inherit the earth. But must the meek be poor? Not if "meek" means "meek before God," which is what it means. The postmillennial solution to this dilemma is the doctrine of a widespread conversion of mankind in the culmination of the millennial age. Matthew 19:23–24 will then no longer be operational. But one or the other passage must be annulled: either Proverbs 13:22 or Matthew 19:23–24. They both cannot be true throughout history.

23. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 16.
24. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 21.

39

HUNDREDFOLD GROWTH

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

MATTHEW 19:27–30

The theocentric focus of this passage was the name of Jesus: "for my name's sake." For His name's sake, it is worth sacrificing everything we own. By this sacrifice, His followers will gain a huge return. This was the issue of expansion: point five of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Status: Thrones of Judgment

Peter's question was in response to Jesus' warning about how few rich men will enter the kingdom of heaven. Peter reminded Him that he and the other disciples had forsaken all, which included their families. They were not rich. He asked: "What's in it for us?" He was looking for assurance of a positive sanction. Christ promised two. *First*, they would exercise authority. They would sit at 12 thrones alongside of Christ. They would judge the 12 tribes of Israel (v. 28). In Luke, we are given another account of this same promise. It relates to the

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1988] 2012), ch. 5.

meaning of the Lord's Supper. "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28–30). What did this mean? Why was this related to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? The link was sanctions. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of judgment: self-judgment, church judgment, and God's judgment.[2] *Second*, they would gain the kingdom. The Jews would lose it, He told them. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Old Covenant Israel was coming to the end of the road. The church was about to inherit the kingdom-related promises of God. One aspect of this kingdom is the rendering of judgment. Jesus had already told them: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18).

The apostles, by bringing the *gospel of the kingdom* to Israel, were bringing a *covenant lawsuit* against Israel. Like the prophets before them, they would suffer persecution by the Jews because of this covenant lawsuit. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:11–12). These were negative sanctions. This was not what Peter wanted to hear. What about the positive sanctions? Jesus told them that they would be agents of judgment against Israel. They would bring judgment against the Jews, who were bringing judgment against them. How would they do this? He did not say. He did not promise them that they would do this in heaven. This may have been His frame of reference, but then they would all have to die before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when judgment arrived.[3] Jesus may have had in mind their preaching of the kingdom. This would be a means of bringing judgment. What He did say is that they would participate with Him in the rendering of judgment against the 12 tribes. The dozen apostles (minus Judas, plus Matthias) would replace the dozen

2. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (I Cor. 11:28–30).

3. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

tribes of Israel.[4] They would serve judicially as representative agents of the New Israel of God, the church.[5]

This was a major blessing. They would become the patriarchs of a new Israel. They would become founders, not in the sense of biology, but rather as forefathers. Their names would extend down through the ages.[6] So few people are remembered in history that becoming part of the historical record of a civilization is generally regarded as a great honor. Fame ranks with money and power in the minds of most people: the desire not to be forgotten. Wealth is far easier to achieve than fame.

B. Inheritance: Multiplication

Exercising authority would be one positive sanction. Second, "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (v. 29). They would receive a hundredfold. This is an image of great wealth.

What had they forfeited? Above all, their families. Also listed is land. This was the context of the promise of a hundredfold increase. This is confusing. If they paid for their time spent with Jesus by losing contact with their families, or possibly losing the trust of their families, how could they be repaid a hundredfold? With money? How much money? How can anyone place a market value on lost family life? In any case, what income? Not monetary income from wandering the roads of Judea.

The context indicates the multiplication of families. The apostles had lost those things closely associated with family life. They would gain access to a new family inheritance. Their efforts in spreading the gospel of the kingdom would lead to a new family: the family of God. *A new era of mass adoption by God was at hand*. The founders of the church would be welcomed into households everywhere. They would become founders of a new family, a family analogous to the family of Old Covenant Israel.

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4. Levi, the priestly tribe, was replaced by the church. The priesthood ceased: no more animal sacrifices.

5. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).

6. "Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor" (Luke 6:14–16). "And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26).

They would be involved in the burial of the old family of God. Israel's inheritance would come to them as the nearest of kin. "And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses" (Num. 27:11). Old Covenant Israel would die without leaving biological heirs. The covenantal heirs would inherit.

The inheritance of Old Covenant Israel would soon pass to the church. The patriarchs of the church would become heirs of all of Israel's promises. Through them, this inheritance would pass to the adopted children of God. The agents of this adoption were the apostles. *They would receive the inheritance of Israel as trustees*.

This did not necessarily mean that they would receive the inheritance in history. The language of their judging Israel on thrones of glory pointed to the opposite: their deaths, one by one, prior to the fall of Jerusalem. But inheritance is covenantal. It is *inheritance by confession*. Their confessional heirs would inherit the promises. In this sense, the apostles would inherit in the name of their heirs. They would inherit definitively in history, though not finally.

C. The First Shall Be Last

"But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." This cryptic statement appears repeatedly in Matthew's gospel. It is quoted by Christians far more widely than it is understood. At least two very different interpretations are possible, given the context of this passage. One flows from what Jesus had just said. The other makes sense because of what Jesus would say next.

The immediately preceding context indicates that Jesus was talking about the apostles. Peter had asked the question: "What shall we have?" The question regarding Jesus' discussion of first and last is this: In relation to whom, future converts to the faith or the Jews? Which did Jesus have in mind? I will examine both possibilities.

As in English, "first" and "last" in Greek can refer to either status or sequence. I will examine both possibilities.

1. The Apostles and Future Converts

The context of Jesus' statement reflects both interpretations of "first" and "last": status and inheritance. Jesus had spoken to them of judging on 12 thrones: judicial status. He had also spoken of a hundredfold inheritance. The preceding context—though not the

subsequent context—indicates that He was speaking of their personal futures, not the future of Christians in general. But was He? It is possible to make a case for such a corporate view.

Consider "first" and "last" in terms of status. "But many that are first [in status] shall be last [in status]; and the last [in status] shall be first [in status]." This makes no sense. The apostles would judge Israel. This meant that they would be first in status. They would occupy 12 thrones "when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory" (v. 28). Taken literally, this means that they would die prior to the fall of Jerusalem. James was executed in A.D. 62.[7] We do not know about the others. Tradition says that John survived until the 90's, but this is based on a late dating of the Book of Revelation. This late dating is difficult to defend. The book was probably written in A.D. 64 or 65.[8]

Consider "first" and "last" in terms of inheritance. "But many that are first [to inherit] shall be last [to inherit]; and the last [to inherit] shall be first [to inherit]." This also makes no sense. Those who died before Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70 would not see their inheritance in history. Those who came later would receive the visible inheritance, yet they were not the first to inherit. The apostles were first. Jesus said so. This was their reward for following Him. This was His answer to Peter's question.

What about a combination of status and inheritance? "But many that are first [in status] shall be last [to inherit]; and the last [in status] shall be first [to inherit]." The apostles were clearly first in status. This was their reward for being the first to forsake all and follow Jesus. But to exercise this honor as judges on thrones, they would either have to die prior to the fall of Jerusalem—heavenly thrones, which seems likely—or perish in the terrible crisis, or escape it by fleeing the city. The first view is more likely: rendering final judgment against Old Covenant Israel from heaven. They would not be the historical recipients of the final inheritance. Rather, they would administer it from heaven. Conversely, the first to receive Israel's covenantal inheritance—those Christians who survived Jerusalem's Great Tribulation in A.D. 70[9]—would be last in status. They would become the forgotten generation.

7. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 47. They cited Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX: 197–203.

8. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: The Date of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

9. Chilton, *Great Tribulation*.

So it was. Nothing written survives of the generation immediately following the fall of Jerusalem: the generation that inherited. The earliest surviving writings of the early church are thought to be from the period of the 90's, over two decades after the fall of Jerusalem. *There would be no remembrance for members of the first generation who inherited.* All we know is that the church survived the Roman wars in Palestine. Church history records that the Jerusalem church fled to the town of Pella, a gentile city, but this information comes from Eusebius, who wrote in A.D. 325.[10] We know almost nothing about the church in the period of the final inheritance.

Inheritance, like sanctification,[11] is definitive, progressive, and final. The apostles received the definitive inheritance. Christ promised it to them. Their work for a generation in bringing the covenant lawsuit against Israel served as the legal basis of the transfer of the inheritance from Israel to the church. This was a progressive inheritance. It took a generation. It involved a war between the false heirs and the true heirs. When the persecutions began, the Jerusalem church fled; only the apostles remained behind to proclaim the covenant lawsuit (Acts 8:1). The apostles died before the final transfer was visible. *They were first in inheriting but last in receiving.* They were like the three patriarchs of Israel and the sons of Jacob: the promise of inheritance in the land had come definitively to Abraham, but none of them lived to see it.

This interpretation places the hundredfold inheritance in the possession of the apostles—an inheritance exercised by faith, not by sight. They became the church's forefathers. This was their reward, along with the reward of sitting on 12 thrones. But if we restrict this promise of hundredfold inheritance to the apostles, this does not answer the question of the inheritance for Christians throughout history. Are we not also participants in the great inheritance? Surely we all "shall inherit everlasting life." Why not also the inheritance? The second interpretation broadens this inheritance.

2. The Apostles and Israel

The second interpretation makes sense in the light of what Jesus said in the next exposition: "So the last shall be first, and the first

10. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, Chap. V.

11. John Murray, "Sanctification," *Collected writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Trust, 1977), II, p. 277. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:A:2.

last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16). In the parable of the householder who goes into the public square to hire workers throughout the day, paying them all a penny per day, the contrast is between the group that worked all day and those groups that arrived throughout the day. The earliest workers complained to the employer that he had made the late-comers equal to them, even though the former had worked the whole day. They thought they deserved more, since they had worked longer.[12] The context of the parable indicates that the complainers were the Jews. Jesus was prophesying that they would resent the fact that God was about to make an offer to the gentiles: equal access to the New Covenant kingdom and also equal payment at the end of the kingdom in history, i.e., eternal life. The Jews would not be given any special consideration in the kingdom for their years of prior service. Furthermore, entrance into heaven would not be based on years of service.

If Jesus' statement here of the first-last dichotomy is interpreted in terms of the next parable, then the comparison is not between the apostles and future converts, but between the apostles and members of Old Covenant Israel, whom the apostles would judge in A.D. 70 from thrones in heaven. The "first" in this context is *Old Covenant Israel*. The "last" is the predominantly *gentile church*, which was represented judicially by the apostles. The text would therefore read: "But many that are [chronologically] first [Israel] shall be last [to enter the New Covenant kingdom]; and the last [the church] shall be first [to enter the New Covenant kingdom]."

Most Jews, hearing of this, would resent it. Jews had long regarded themselves as first in terms of status because they were chronologically first in terms of God's calling. But what they ignored was their history of rebellion, which would soon culminate in the crucifixion of Christ. Old Covenant Israel would continue to reject the message of the disciples. The nation would suffer the consequences. "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Matt. 10:14–15). "But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would

12. Chapter 40.

have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:22–24).

The inheritance here is the inheritance of the kingdom throughout history, not just in the first century. The Jews will remain as would-be heirs. They will inherit their share of the kingdom only by being grafted into the church (Rom. 11),[13] which grants access on the same terms, with the same rewards, to all men. They will enter the kingdom as lawful heirs, but they will enter last. They came into the Old Covenant church first, but this unique honor does not carry into the New Covenant. They would gain access to the kingdom as everyone else does: through the church.

3. A General Promise

Jesus told them, "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." This was not a promise to the apostles only, but to Christians in general. Their multiplication through time will encompass the whole earth. The church's progressive fulfillment of the Great Commission will extend the dominion covenant to the uttermost limits.1[14]

The second interpretation—apostles (first) and Israel (last)—seems more consistent with this interpretation of the promise. *The promise is to every generation*. He who forsakes all to follow Christ is adopted into a confessional family. He gains his inheritance through his brethren. The division of labor increases as the body of Christ expands (Rom. 12;[15] I Cor. 12[16]). This increase in the division of labor increases every member's productivity and wealth, and also the wealth of those outside the church through common grace.[17] Even the covenant-breaking dogs under the table will feast on the abundance of crumbs. This is why Paul could write of the future conversion of the Jews: "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles,

13. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

14. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

15. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 10.

16. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

17. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Rom. 11:11–12). When the gentile church achieves something worth being jealous of—the widespread extension of God's kingdom in history—the Jews will join.

Conclusion

The promise of multiplication had to do with inheritance. Whatever the apostles had already lost and would continue to lose as disciples of Christ, they would regain a hundredfold through their spiritual heirs. The church down through history constitutes their inheritance. They would have lost their inheritance anyway, had they remained loyal to Old Covenant Israel, whose time had come. The transfer of Israel's inheritance—the kingdom of God—was at hand. The apostles would become the original trustees in the transfer of the inheritance to their covenantal heirs. As forefathers, they would see their heirs and their heirs' wealth multiplied. They would see this in history only by the eyes of faith, just as Abraham had seen his inheritance.[18] But the transfer was as secure as Abraham's had been. They had Christ's word. They could trust Him.

This promise of inheritance extends to every generation. Adoption into the church brings every Christian into covenantal union with others of the same confession. Their inheritance is the whole earth.[19] This inheritance is open to everyone who follows Christ. The expansion of this inheritance is achieved through the extension of God's kingdom throughout history: the Great Commission.

This places top priority on the preaching of the gospel. The apostles' task is our task, too: to work for the multiplication of heirs through adoption by God. The task in proclaiming the gospel was two-fold, for the covenant's sanctions are two-fold: blessing and cursing, inheritance and disinheritance. The apostles would gain their inheritance through their covenantal heirs. This would require the disinheritance of Old Covenant Israel, which they would oversee from the 12 thrones.

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18. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8–10).

19. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

40

THE RIGHTS OF OWNERSHIP

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

MATTHEW 20:1–16

The theocentric principle here was the sovereignty of God in choosing who is to be redeemed and who is not. The passage dealt with stewardship: point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

A. The Right of Voluntary Contract

This is one of Jesus' pocketbook parables. Most people understand the affairs of the marketplace far better than they understand theology. Jesus used pocketbook parables to communicate fundamental theological truths.

The householder had authority over his vineyard. He had the right to offer to hire whomever he pleased. No one had to accept his offer. The laborers were sovereign over their decision to accept his offer or reject it. Between the householder and a laborer, a bargain was possible.

The householder's primary goal was to care for his vineyard. This is an extension of God's assignment to Adam: to dress and defend the garden. He sought assistance in this task. He made use of the division of labor. He could not do everything that needed to be done. So, he went into the marketplace to hire workers. He went out early in the morning. He found men who were willing to work. He offered them a penny a day. They accepted his offer and headed for the vineyard. Then he went out at the third hour (nine in the morning by Roman standards).[2] He found other men standing idle. This time, he offered work on a different basis: "whatsoever is right I will give you" (v. 4). They trusted him, accepted the offer, and headed for the fields. He repeated this three hours later and six hours later. At the eleventh hour—late in the day—he did it again. "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." They accepted. They trusted him. Then came the time of payment. He faithfully followed the Mosaic law. He paid them on the day of their labor. "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning" (Lev. 19:13).[3] He abided by God's law. He was a just man.

He told his steward, "Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the

2. The sixth hour after sunrise in the Roman calendar was noon. The length of the hour varied according to the seasons.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 13.

day." He had promised the early laborers a fixed wage. He paid them what he had promised. He had promised the others a fair wage. He paid them what he had paid the full-day laborers. Surely this was fair to the part-timers. But the full-day laborers begin to complain as soon as they received their pay. "This is unfair." They had worked so much longer. They deserved more. So they said.

The employer's answer rested on the moral validity of contracts. "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" They had been paid what he had promised. What was the moral basis of their complaint?

B. Imperfect Knowledge and Risk

Earlier that morning, they had not known that there was going to be employment later in the day for a full day's wages. They had wanted employment at the wage offered. He had offered it to them. The arrangement was perceived by employer and employees as mutually beneficial. The workers went to work. They received what they had been promised. No one had been cheated. The employer had not known that he would hire more people later in the day. Even if he had known, he had no moral obligation, and surely no legal obligation, to reveal this to the early workers.

Those who came later were more trusting of the employer. He had not said exactly what he would be pay. They would be paid what was right. They agreed to this verbal contract. They would not have an enforceable contract in any court if he paid them too little—too little from their point of view. Nevertheless, they decided that he was a righteous man who would not cheat them. They were proven correct at the end of the day.

The early workers had borne less risk. They had an enforceable contract. The later workers bore more risk. They did not have a specific contract. When men bear greater risk, they seek a higher rate of return to compensate them for the extra risk. The men who had gone to work early received a lower hourly rate of compensation, but they had borne less risk. The others received a higher hourly rate, but they had borne greater risk. There was nothing inherently out of order with the respective pay scales.

The parable ends with final payment. This parable has as its focus the entire history of the kingdom of God. The employer's final pay-

ment symbolizes final judgment. There would not be work available the next day. Had there been another day of work, cunning workers would have put off going into the marketplace until the afternoon, hoping to reap a full day's wages for a partial day's work. But the parable is not about second chances. The laborers in this parable did not have advanced information on the outcome of everyone's efforts. They had only a promise: a penny (early comers) or "what is right" (late comers).

The parable is not about long-term labor-management relations. It is about the kingdom of God in history. Men make decisions about what they can expect from God for their obedience. They think about the risk-reward ratio of their decisions. The early morning workers compared the risk of nonpayment vs. payment. They also compared expected wages with the likelihood of better employment offers later in the day. They concluded that a day of work in the vineyard was the best available offer. They did not have information about the employer's previous payment practices.

Those who came into the fields later did not have specific information about their pay. They could not spread the word to other workers that they were being paid a penny for less time in the fields. That might have created a walk-out on the part of the early workers. Only at the end of the day did they all receive information about comparative hourly rates of pay. By then, their work was completed.

God comes to every man, whether late in his life or early, and offers to pay what is right. Some men trust Him; others do not. For those who truly love their kingdom work, it matters little who gets paid what, just so long as they remain in favor with the Employer. The opportunity to work is what matters most to them. If they were recruited early, so much the better: they had more time to serve God.

C. False Expectations

The parable speaks of groups of workers. They are grouped by the time of day at which they were recruited. There is a collective aspect of this hiring process. It is not just a person-by-person recruiting process. It is this collective aspect that reveals what the parable is really about: Jews and groups of gentiles.

The workers who had toiled through the day had expected a penny for their efforts. But then came the time of payment. The paymaster eventually paid the early workers a penny, but he did not pay them first. He began with the latest comers and moved backward. None of

the late comers who had arrived at the ninth hour complained about the pay given to the eleventh-hour arrivals. None of those who had arrived at the sixth hour or third hour complained.

As the pennies were handed out, the earliest comers may have grown worried. Each worker was being paid a penny, no matter how long he had toiled. Would the original contract still apply to them? Or would it be revised at the last moment? Doubt must have spread among the members of the first group, as each group was paid. What was going on here? Everyone was being paid the same. Yet no one was complaining. The third-hour arrivals had worked almost a full day, yet they did not complain. This was very strange. Why were they silent? This pay schedule was clearly unfair. But the earliest comers did not speak up in protest until their turn came, and each received his penny. They did not risk protesting until it was clear that their contract would not be revised upward. Then they complained bitterly. "Thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day."

Equality. That was what bothered them. Not the money as such, but the equality it implied. It was all right with them that the others had been treated as equals to each other, no matter how early or late they went to work. But why should any of these late comers be regarded as the equals of the earliest comers? Yes, all the other late comers deserved a penny, no matter when they arrived on the job. But the earliest workers thought they deserved more. It did not matter what they had agreed to. The fact that late comers were being paid a penny made the early comers resentful. They were somehow being cheated—not contractually but morally. They knew they deserved more. When, at the end of the day's labor, all of the workers were paid the same, the early comers could not contain their anger at the employer.

It is obvious who the complainers were in this parable: the Jews. Jesus made it plain in this parable that the final reward—access to heaven—would be handed out equally to all those who had worked in the vineyard. *This was clearly a matter of mercy to the gentiles*. The same reward would be obtained by all, irrespective of the time of day they arrived on the scene. All of the late arrivals accepted this, but the original workers did not. There should have been something extra for them, they believed.

The employer told them otherwise. "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful

for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" Their eye was intensely evil. *They deeply resented the grace shown by the employer to the other employees*. It made the late comers appeal equal to the original men in the fields. This equality led them to protest. They were deeply opposed to the idea that the employer's grace was the basis of their income. They believed that they had a legal claim on the employer beyond the contract. They had earned their wages fair and square, unlike the late comers.

D. Few Are Chosen

Jesus said, "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen" (v. 20). Who had been called? All of the unemployed workers had been called. All those who responded to the call had been chosen to work. Then what did Jesus mean about few being chosen? Chosen for what? It is clear: eternal life.

The payment was the same for all. This has to refer to payment at the end of the day, i.e., final judgment. There would be no tomorrow. This time frame is history. They had all worked. They were all paid the same. The first ones to go to work were the last to be paid. The first nation to go to work in God's Old Covenant kingdom was Israel. The parable warned the Jews that those who would arrive later—the gentiles—would be paid the same as the Jews, who had arrived first.

The Jews had long been told about what covenant-keepers would receive: the earth. "What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 25:12–13). "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:9). The basis of this inheritance is ethics, not race or nationalism. There had never been any doubt about this on God's part. But the Jews misinterpreted this promise. They saw it in terms of nationalism. The victory would go to Israel. Gentiles could gain a share of this by becoming Jews, but access to the kingdom would always be through Israel. Israel would always have priority.

Not so, Jesus warned in this parable. Access to God's kingdom is always by God's grace. God would invite other groups throughout history, Jesus said. Nation by nation, gentiles would enter the kingdom. Late arrivals would gain the same reward: eternal inheritance.

In the parable, the late arrivals were paid first. The earliest arrivals did not know for sure that they would be paid the same amount. This parable made it clear: the Jews would be paid the same. The gentiles

had not yet been invited into the kingdom at the time that Jesus gave this parable, but they soon would be. The sovereignty of God is the basis of who gets chosen. God had called the Jews, but they would soon lose title to the kingdom. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). They would no longer be first in terms of status. Jesus knew their hearts. He knew God's plan. *They would not accept final payment—salvation—on the basis of equality with the gentiles.* Many Jews were being called, but few would be chosen.

Jesus understood the pride of the Jews. Because they had been working longer, they thought they should be paid more. They wanted eternal life, plus something more, presumably status. Jesus' previous lesson indicated that the plus—status—would go to the apostles, who would sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28).[4] Jews and their representatives would be subordinate in the kingdom to the founders of the church.

This parable was a warning to the Jews. If they objected in advance to the payment offered for participation in the kingdom, they would not enter the kingdom. The earliest workers in the parable had not been told that others would come later, work shorter hours, and be paid the same. But the Jews were now being told this. The complaining workers of the parable clearly would not have accepted their jobs on these terms. Jesus warned them: you had better accept payment on God's terms. The New Covenant would not favor any group, He said. Each group would have to accept its equality of legal status, i.e., judicially saved by grace.

When Christ said that many are called but few are chosen, He was referring to two groups, Old Covenant Israel and the gentiles. He was not referring people in general. He was not speaking of the percentages of people brought to saving faith in every generation in relation to the general population.[5] He was referring to the percentage of Jews who would enter the kingdom in the long period prior to their eschatological grafting in.[6] In this parable, all of the late comers—the gen-

4. Chapter 39.

5. This passage is not a valid proof text for amillennialists or premillennialists who would use it against postmillennialists.

6. "And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive tree?" (Rom. 11:23–24). Cf. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, [1864] 1950), p. 365; Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of the Epistle*

tiles—gratefully accepted their pay. It was the original workers who complained. The employer asked: "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" This was what Christ was asking the Jews. Were they going to interpret God's looming act of grace to the gentiles as something evil because the gentiles would arrive in the kingdom later than the Jews had? Were the Jews going to reject the offer of eternal life because the same offer would soon be made to the gentiles? In the parable, Christ did not answer the question, but He made it clear that the morning workers resented equality with the late comers. The implication was that they would never have accepted the job on this basis. Many are called, but few are chosen.

The reference to groups of workers symbolizes nations. The Jews constituted one nation. Gentile nations would also come into the kingdom. This parable is not exclusively about individuals; it is also about groups. The Jewish nation was one group among many. This was the stumbling stone of Jesus' message.

It is clear that the parable is about salvation: payment at the end of the day. All of the workers will be paid the same, Jesus said. This has to refer to eternal salvation. But isn't eternal salvation strictly individual? Not according to the Bible. God brings nations into eternity. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9–10). "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it" (Rev. 21:23–26). God deals eternally with men as they lived in history: members of large groups. The equal ultimacy of the one and the many in the Trinity will be reflected in humanity's condition in eternity, just as it is in history. Only in hell and the lake of fire will individualism be absolute: God's judgment on covenant-breakers' self-professed autonomy.

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to the Romans (Mac Dill Air Force Base, Florida: MacDonald Pub. Co., [1839] 1958), pp. 632–33; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965), II, pp. 65–103.

This parable deals with nations or peoples: Jews and gentiles. Jesus said that gentile nations will come into the kingdom over time. He was warning the Jews: accept this arrangement or have the kingdom removed from you. They did not heed His warning. So, He removed the kingdom from them. The gentiles became the heirs.

E. The Owner's Rights

The employer asked the ungrateful workers, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" (15a). Few verses in the Bible more eloquently defend the principle of private ownership. This parable is about God's sovereignty in inviting gentiles and Jews on equal terms to participate in the New Covenant kingdom. But its language defending this doctrine of God's sovereignty is not theological; it is judicial. The employer affirms his legal right to dispose of his own property as he sees fit.

This answer was intended to confound Jesus' critics. It is God's right to invite anyone He chooses into His kingdom. It is His right to grant to gentile converts access to the kingdom on exactly the same judicial basis that He grants it to Jews. The first to gain title to the New Covenant kingdom will be the gentiles, Jesus told the Jews. Paul made this even clearer in Romans 11.[7]

In the interim period when both covenants were in force, before the deaths of the apostles, Old Covenant Israel was given equal access to the kingdom. The kingdom was definitively transferred to the church with Christ's resurrection (Matt. 28:18–20). It was progressively transferred after Pentecost. In A.D. 70, the kingdom was finally taken from the Jews and transferred to a new nation, the church. After the fall of Jerusalem, Old Covenant Israel ceased to exist. Rabbinic Judaism replaced it: the triumph of the Pharisees over the Sadducees, who had been associated with temple sacrifices. Herbert Danby, whose English translation of the Mishnah is still considered authoritative by the scholarly world, both Jewish and gentile, commented on the undisputed triumph of the Pharisees after the fall of Jerusalem (which lives on as Orthodox Judaism): "Until the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70 they had counted as one only among the schools of thought which played a part in Jewish national and religious life; after the Destruction they took the position, naturally and almost immediately, of sole and undisputed leaders of such Jewish

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

life as survived. Judaism as it has continued since is, if not their creation, at least a faith and a religious institution largely of their fashioning; and the Mishnah is the authoritative record of their labour."[8]

This parable teaches that the authority of the owner over the use of his property is analogous to the authority of God over the terms of salvation. This parable is a therefore stumbling block for every defender of socialism, communism, fascism, and the Keynesian economy. This parable sets forth a judicial principle of individual ownership and contract labor that leads to an inescapable conclusion: *the modern welfare state is biblically illegitimate*. Critics of biblical economics who argue that the Old Testament may have laid down laws that will produce a free market economy, but the New Testament does not, have steadfastly refused to comment on this parable.

Conclusion

When the parable says many are called but few are chosen, it refers to the Jewish nation. When it says that the first shall be last, it refers to the Jewish nation. The groups of workers in the parable came into the field at different times. Members of each group were paid at the same time. The later arrivals were paid first, from the latest to the earliest. The first nation—the Jews—was paid last. Workers were also paid the same.

This parable asserts the sovereignty of God in establishing the terms of access to the kingdom of God and payment for participation. It does so by invoking the right of property owners to do as they please with their property. It affirms the right of voluntary contracts between employers and employees. It defends the private property order against those who think that some higher principle of justice should override the terms of a labor contract. Occasionally, the Bible reveals such principles, such as the requirement that employers pay their employees no later than the end of the working day (Lev. 19:13).[9] The Bible informs us of such exceptions to the sovereignty of contracts. Disgruntled workers or their political and academic spokesmen are not the source of authoritative information on the nature of contracts.

The top priorities set forth in this parable are faithful adherence to contracts and righteous dealing with others. An employer is allowed

8. Herbert Danby, Introduction, *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. xiii.

9. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 13.

to give more to a worker than the worker expects. The employer is not to be criticized by those workers who receive what they had previously agreed to.

41

THE PRINCIPLE OF SERVICE

> *But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*
>
> MATTHEW 20:25–28

Jesus announced the same principle later in His ministry: "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:11–12). The theocentric principle undergirding this principle of rulership is the need for a ransom payment to God. God's wrath must be placated. Someone must pay. This was the issue of servitude: point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Jesus Paid It All

Jesus identified Himself as the one who would pay this ransom on behalf of man. For paying this price, God the Father granted Jesus absolute power. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18b). This was God's gift to Jesus. His sacrificial death led to His glorification in history.

Jesus gained absolute power over history, not solely in His status as God, but also in His status as human. He had possessed absolute

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

power prior to His incarnation, but not in His status as human. To achieve this on man's behalf, He had to humble Himself in His status as God. Paul wrote: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:5–11).[2]

What God did, covenant-keeping men must imitate. To achieve dominion in history, they must subordinate themselves to God. The evidence of this subordination is their service to other men. They must become servants.

B. Dominion Through Service: Covenantal

Jesus here made it plain that *dominion is a legitimate goal*. This has to mean dominion over others, i.e., holding an office. God has placed man over the creation (Gen. 1:26–28).[3] Some men are placed legally over other men. This is the doctrine of judicial representation—also an aspect of point two. The question is: What are the legitimate means of attaining dominion?

1. Military Command

We begin, as Jesus did, with a description of ecclesiastically illegitimate means. He said that the princes of the gentiles exercise authority over their subordinates. This means that they issue commands, and these commands must be followed. Those who refuse to obey necessarily risk the pain of negative sanctions. This system of rule requires a top-down chain of command. This is the kind of authority that Jesus exercised over sickness. When the Roman centurion described his own authority over his troops as analogous Jesus' authority over illness, Jesus praised this confession of faith. He healed the

2. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

man's servant from a distance, which the centurion had affirmed that He could do, so great was His authority (Matt. 8:8–10).

This form of military command is not the model for the church's government. The military is a subset of civil government. The military serves the nation. Officers serve the nation best by placing at risk their lives and the lives of their men. Yet even here, the successful leader places his men's interests above his own. He protects his men's lives before he protects his career. He obeys orders that place his men at extreme risk, not to advance his career, but to serve as a model for his men. A battle plan sometimes involves the deliberate sacrifice of some units. Even here, the Western military tradition encourages volunteerism: high-risk operations are very often staffed by volunteers or special forces.

Jesus was speaking to His disciples in their capacity as church members. He was not speaking to a group of soldiers. The principle of leadership that He laid down here is not appropriate for the army, whose task, as one officer has put it, is "to kill people and break things." Leaders in the church are supposed to be servants, not military commanders. The proper pathway to authority in the church is the way of service. Paul made this clear in his first epistle to Timothy. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (I Tim. 3:2–4).[4] The person so described is self-sacrificing.

That this is the avenue to ecclesiastical authority is not intuitively obvious. The exercise of power is the more common avenue to public greatness. The strong man compels obedience. He also rewards it. He rules by means of sanctions, positive and negative. But how is this different from authority in the church? The distinction is not easy to state. For example, we can say that the way to authority in the church is through service to those without any power, but this is not true in a church where members vote. Members have sanctions to impose. They vote to hire or fire a pastor. They vote for officers. If a man's goal is high office, the favor of those possessing these sanctions is surely valuable to him. Similarly, in the worldly quest for power, men serve those who possess greater power. They subordinate themselves to those who can reward them. But church members who vote can

4. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

also reward others with leadership positions. Those seeking authority do subordinate themselves to those with the votes. Where is the distinction between church authority and other forms of authority? What did Jesus mean? "But it shall not be so among you."

2. Service Unto Death

Christ's service was service unto death. This places His service beyond the ability of men to repay. He did not die to placate men. He died to placate God. He subordinated Himself to evil men in history in order to liberate men from sin and death.

Service in the church is to be analogous. The legitimate road to dominion is through service to those who cannot repay. God will raise up such a servant to a position of leadership. Yet in the modern church where members vote, almost everyone can repay. This is also true in civil government. To understand what Jesus was getting at, we must consider His era.

In the gentile world in Jesus' day, democracy was a relic of the past. Rome had moved from a republic to an empire under Caesar Augustus in the generation before Jesus' birth. The trappings of representative government were still visible, but not the substance. To gain and hold power, men had to seek favor with members of the oligarchy that held power. The people could not grant political office or withhold it from those above them. There was no public veto over the affairs of state. Power was granted from above.

3. Ecclesiastical Office

The church reflected this hierarchy. When it came time to replace Judas, the eleven apostles made the decision regarding who would be the two candidates. Then they turned it over to God. "And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:23–26). On what basis did the apostles narrow the list of candidates? The text does not say. But we know what it was from Jesus' words: those in authority decided in terms of the service of the two men. The standard was not service to the apostles, but service to the congregation.

Those with power in the church should heed Christ's words. They must use service to others than themselves as the criterion for screening the candidates for high office. It is clear from the passage in Acts that democracy was not part of the procedure. They used the casting of lots to allow God to make the final decision. This practice had to be replaced in A.D. 70: the fall of Jerusalem, when judicially authoritative divine revelation ceased.

Then to what extent is the Book of Acts a legitimate model for today? Hierarchy has not been annulled. How do Jesus' words apply to church hierarchy? First, there must be a screening procedure. The standard of service to others must be applied by those who are not being served. The screening committee must not become self-serving. It must not choose its successors based on service to the personal interests of members of the hierarchy. Committee members must be able to perceive that a potential candidate is active in his service to the members.

Second, there must be competition. There must be more than one candidate for each office. The screening committee can and must apply the criteria, but it must not assume that only one person is capable of holding office. This assumes too much wisdom on the part of a committee. Committees are rarely creative. They function best as nay-sayers. They veto bad ideas. They should decide only what things in general should be done and not done, and to hire and fire the senior officer. Implementation must be left to individuals who answer to the committee.

Third, there must be third-party sanctions. Someone other than the screening committee must have the final decision. In the case in Acts, God was the third party. *To lodge final authority in the representative body is to create an implicit tyranny*. The representatives should always face a veto by those represented. As in the case of a committee, the large body that comprises those represented cannot devise and implement specific policies. They covenant with each other in a mutual quest of general goals. Then they choose who will lead them. But they cannot escape responsibility before God. If their leaders fall, they fall (Lev. 4).[5]

The gentiles served those above them. Obedience to an ever-more narrow hierarchy was the way to power. Rulership was a matter of coercion: issuing orders to those below. The authority to issue orders

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

was seen as the great prize. Jesus announced a different system of hierarchy: the principle of servanthood. Instead of issuing orders to those beneath, the ruler is to serve them. Coercion is thereby minimized.

G. Servants' Rights

Men pervert this rule when they seek leadership roles by serving only those who can repay them with the robes of authority. They imitate rebellious Absalom, who stood in the city's gates and promised justice to all men.[6] They pretend to serve. They flatter those served in a strategy of gaining the power to issue orders.

How can those served protect themselves? First, by not consenting to a system of administrative rule. They must keep church government weak. All government is a system of hierarchy, but the biblical model for church and state (but not family) is a bottom-up hierarchy. Rulers are judges who hear disputes (Ex. 18).[7] They are not to issue orders that do not arise from either the formal settling of disputes or from the application of God's Bible-revealed law. Court decisions can become precedents. Precedents can be codified. Law books summarize court decisions. But the idea of a legislature that issues new laws by fiat is contrary to the principle of the appeals court.

Second, those served must exercise judicial sanctions from time to time. They must decide who will rule over them. In doing so, they exercise a veto over the decisions of the representative body, either directly or indirectly.

Third, they must decide whether to remain in covenant with a local congregation. Competition among congregations is as good a thing as competition among candidates for church office. Servants should be allowed to vote with their feet. Original sin teaches that men cannot be trusted with unilateral power. If power is exercised only downward, the result is tyranny. If a self-appointing hierarchy

6. "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (II Sam. 15:2–6).

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

determines the distribution of the inheritance, those who provide the funding should reduce that inheritance by transferring their membership and their tithes.

D. Dominion Through Service: Free Market

The free market order is based on a principle of service analogous to the one that Jesus set forth as binding in the church. The producer must serve the customer if he wishes to maximize his return. He must act in the present as a representative of future customers. He must forecast what they will be willing and able to pay in the future. Then he must enter the market for production goods. He must buy or rent them, restructure them, store them, advertise them, and deliver them to paying customers. If he misforecasts, he will produce losses. If he forecasts correctly, he will produce profits.[8]

Customers are legally sovereign over their assets. The customer decides whether or not to buy an item offered for sale. The seller has no legal compulsion over him in a free market economy. The seller has a legal claim on his own products, but he does not have a legal claim on the customer's money. The seller of goods is legally sovereign over what he owns, just as the potential customer is legally sovereign over what he owns. But the customer is economically sovereign. Why? Because he possesses the most marketable asset: money. The seller owns a specialized asset. It has a much narrower market. There are far fewer people rushing to give him money in exchange for his asset than there are sellers who are pursuing customers for their money. The customers, because they own money, are economically sovereign.

In rare instances, the producer is sovereign. These cases usually are unique life-and-death situations. The physician at the scene of an accident is sovereign over a critically injured person. The injured person is not in a position to negotiate. But such cases are exceptions. The general market principle is this: customers are economically sovereign over producers. While both parties are buyers and both are sellers, he who sells money is considered the buyer. He is economically sovereign because he owns the most marketable commodity.

To maximize their returns, sellers must conform to the demand established by buyers. The structure of the free market is not a pyramid-like hierarchy. Sellers and buyers meet on equal legal terms: as legal owners of marketable assets. Neither is legally sovereign over

8. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921).

the other. Neither can compel the other to meet his demands. The only negative sanction that either of them can impose on the other is the refusal to enter into an exchange. The free market is therefore not a covenantal institution.

In a covenantal institution, there is a hierarchy of legal authority. Subordinates take an oath before God that they will defer to the decisions of ordained superiors. They owe them allegiance, for they owe God allegiance, and their superiors represent them before God (Lev. 4).[9] The superior has a legal claim on his subordinates. This is not the legal relationship between buyers and sellers in a free market economy.

Any attempt to insert the legal structure of a covenant into market relationships undermines the economic sovereignty of asset-owning customers. Other would-be customers, who do not possess sufficient assets, or who wish to use their assets for other purposes, may decide to call for the state to redistribute wealth. They may call on the state to compel producers to meet their demand at below-market prices by legally forbidding the bids of competing customers. The substitution of one party's legal sovereignty over mutual exchange undermines the sovereignty of customers in general.

Legislation favoring certain groups is introduced and passed on the basis of a deception. The public is told that the legislation protects an entire group, when it really favors one segment of this group at the expense of most of the other members. Above-market returns are possible only because one segment of the group is protected by law from competition from other segments. The higher the returns, the fewer the beneficiaries: fewer participants to share the loot. Consider legislation passed in the name of *producers' sovereignty*: tariffs, import quotas, cartels, quality controls, price floors, compulsory trade union laws, and regulation in general. Or consider legislation passed in the name of defending *customers' sovereignty*: price ceilings, quality controls, laws barring racial discrimination in renting or selling, and rationing. Such legislation annuls the legal sovereignty of *excluded* producers and customers over their own property. It forcibly removes them from the competitive bidding process. In doing so, it restricts the market, thereby lowering the division of labor and reducing output per unit of resource input. It reduces the wealth of those discriminated against, all in the name of the public interest. In the name of a "government-business partnership," it revokes the legal

9. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 4.

sovereignty of politically unskilled producers. In the name of "consumerism," it revokes the legal sovereignty of politically unskilled customers. It restricts men's legal right to bid.

Conclusion

The principle of hierarchical service governs the biblical covenant. The covenant is bound by an oath to God, implicit or explicit. It involves legal claims. Where hierarchy is biblically covenantal, rulers are to seek dominion by serving the needs of their subordinates. God honors those with the power to enforce their will on others when they restrain themselves and sacrifice their own interests for the sake of their subordinates. This is what Jesus did in both of His offices: God and man.

The top priority here is service to others. This rule governs all men: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3–4). But it especially governs those who have been entrusted with authority by God and man.

42

MONOPOLY PRICING

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

MATTHEW 21:12–13

The theocentric principle here is the holiness of the worship of God: point three of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Holy Housecleaning

This was the second time that Jesus performed this cleansing of the temple. The first time was during the week before the Passover, three years earlier. "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:13–16). Here, He did it again. Liberals argue that the two accounts are scrambled chronologically. Conservatives argue that the priests were slow learners.

Jesus was not arrested either time. This is very strange. He clearly had violated other people's property rights. He had used force. He

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

had entered a holy place and called the resident exchangers harsh names. By doing so, He was challenging those in charge of the temple. They allowed this to go on. But what, exactly, was going on? Something that Jesus called theft. This was a very serious accusation. Yet the authorities did nothing. They did not formally accuse Jesus of being a false witness.

There was a reason: they were guilty as charged. But what were they guilty of? In John's account, He called them merchandisers. In Matthew's account, He called them thieves. Why was it theft to be a merchandiser? Why would Jesus have twice singled out those inside the temple as the objects of His wrath? Scripture gives no indication that He ever physically assaulted anyone else, yet He used a whip on these people the first time.

2. Holy Space

The temple was holy space, God's sanctuary. Inside its walls a higher ethical standard was to prevail. The closer that men came to the holy of holies, the greater the threat to them of their own moral pollution. God might bring sanctions against them. This is why the three families of Levi served as guardians of the temple, surrounding it in concentric circles (Num. 3; 4).[2]

When the merchants set up shop within the walls of the temple, they accepted greater responsibility for dealing righteously. They were not selling items in a market with open entry to competitors. Their merchandise had to meet high standards. The body of no blemished animal could lawfully be burned on the altar.[3] Thus, the animals sold for sacrifice had to be screened by the priests or their agents. To do this screening conveniently, the priests brought the merchants' tables inside the boundary of the temple.

One of the forms of sacrifice was a coin, the shekel. The temple originally had its own shekel.[4] It was the standard of weight and fineness for temple assessments. "This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is 20 gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD" (Ex. 30:13). It was therefore unlawful to bring a coin from outside the temple unless it was of the same weight and fineness.

2. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 3:D.

3. Leviticus 1:3; 3:1; 4:3, 23, etc.

4. Exodus 30:24; 38:24–26; Leviticus 5:15; Numbers 7.

In Jesus' day, Jews came from around the Mediterranean to offer sacrifice. They brought many different kinds of coins. The Jews did not approve of coins with people's likenesses on them, especially the emperor's, which bore proclamations of his divinity.[5] During the Bar Kochba rebellion (133–35 A.D.), the Jews hammered out the images of the emperors on Roman coins and drew in scenes from the temple.[6] To bring a Roman coin to make an offering would have been a sacrilege. These coins had to be exchanged for temple coins.

2. False Dealing

This would have created opportunities for false dealing. The temple coins could have been sold at a premium beyond the weight and fineness of the coins' metals. It is likely that the moneychangers had been given a special dispensation by the priests. Moneychangers inside the walls of the temple would not have faced competition from rivals who were not authorized by temple authorities. Over decades and centuries, devious practices would have become common. The opportunity for above-market returns is always tempting and rarely resisted for long. Higher prices charged by the temple's moneychangers would have raised suspicion about the priests' collusion. To transfer the monopoly power to charge higher than open-entry prices is to transfer wealth. Those who possess such power are unlikely to transfer it free of charge. Once transferred, such a monopoly is difficult to revoke. Those who pay in advance for it expect to be compensated. They bid up the entry price on the basis of expected future income. They resist any attempt to lower the price unless they are offered refunds.[7]

Jesus identified their practices as theft. They were stealing from the faithful who came to offer sacrifice. They were also stealing from God. They were undermining His reputation. False weights and measures are an abomination to God. "But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 25:15).[8] "A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just

5. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 125–27. (Reprinted by Wipf & Stock, 2008).

6. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

7. This observation applies to all forms of licensing that require extra training or initial payment.

8. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

weight is his delight" (Prov. 11:1).[9] The misuse of a monopoly granted in God's name was the judicial equivalent of false weights.

The priests did not prosecute Jesus. Why not? The most obvious reason is that they were in collusion with the merchants who were extracting monopoly returns.

B. Who Owned the Temple?

Jesus asserted that He was the Son of the Owner. In Matthew's account, Jesus cited an Old Testament passage: "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer;[10] but ye have made it a den of thieves."[11] But, in John's account, He made a claim: "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:16). He was the true heir. He was coming on behalf of the Owner of the temple.

Jesus twice invaded the outer court and overturned the tables. This violation of property rights was grounded in law: as the designated agent of the Owner, He was authorized to enforce the terms of the lease. This was a house of prayer; it had been turned into a place where thieves took advantage of worshippers. They were using the sacred character of the temple to extract monopoly profits. They were cashing in on God's name.

1. Squatters

Jesus rightly regarded them as squatters. They presumably had been authorized by the chief priest to conduct their operations. By physically assaulting the moneychangers, Jesus was announcing His revolt against the religious authorities. He was challenging the faithfulness of the hierarchy, i.e., the priesthood. They were false priests, He indirectly asserted. They deserved no better treatment than the moneychangers. In fact, they deserved worse. They knew better. They bore greater responsibility. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall

9. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 29.

10. "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:6–7).

11. "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD" (Jer. 7:11).

be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48).[12]

The agent of the Owner routed the agents of the priesthood. The priests claimed to act on God's behalf in His name. Jesus visibly challenged this claim by forcibly driving out the priests' agents. This was a conflict between authorities: a self-ordained establishment vs. a man baptized by an outsider who was regarded by the people as a prophet. This was one more confrontation between a prophet and the priesthood. Prophets had usually lost these confrontations, and the ecclesiastical winners subsequently perished at the hand of some invading military power. So it would be again, but this time the invader would end the Old Covenant order by burning the temple.

Jesus' violation of the property rights of the economic agents of the priests was based on His superior claim of ownership. He did not appeal to the existing authorities to enforce His claim. He acted on His own authority, for He had been given this authority by the Owner. Soon thereafter, the priests would attempt to undermine His authority. "And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things" (Matt. 21:23–27). Once again, He undermined their authority by His answer.

2. Superior Authority

The priests feared the people. The people respected John's memory. Jesus had been baptized by John. If the people could not be swayed in their opinion regarding Jesus' authority, the priests were

12. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

powerless to reassert their authority. Their hold on the affections of the people was tenuous. The question was: What about Jesus' hold on the people's affections? Could this be broken? He had used force against their agents. They would soon use force on Him, first in a trial before the Sanhedrin, and then by trials by Roman authorities.

Control over the temple was at the heart of the question of authority in Israel. *Through His actions against the moneychangers, Jesus was asserting a superior claim of authority*. He had already made this claim: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:56–58). *A prior legal claim is a superior claim*. He was asserting a claim that predated the temple.

The Jewish leaders had to silence His claim. If they could not do this, their claim of representation would be undermined. They would be overthrown. To silence Him, they finally appealed to Rome. They invoked Rome's authority in order to eliminate Jesus' authority. "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

Jesus attacked the invaders of the temple. He did so in the name of God. He claimed to be the lawful heir. He referred to the temple as "my Father's house." In the context of what had taken place immediately prior to this confrontation, this was a sensational claim. The people had just proclaimed Him as the heir of David's throne. "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:8–9). Now He was asserting jurisdiction over the temple. David could not have made such a claim. He had been a king, not a priest. He was of the family of Judah. Levi was the priestly family.

One man in history had possessed such authority: Melchizedek. "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:18). To him Abraham presented tithes (v. 20). Jesus was therefore announcing a new priesthood, meaning a new hierarchy. "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of

Melchisedec" (Heb. 6:20). This meant that a New Covenant would be in force, with new laws. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 7:12–17).

3. Resurrected Temple

The legal right of Jesus to throw out the moneychangers was verified by His resurrection. By this, He demonstrated publicly that He was God's designated agent. He possessed the right to enforce the terms of the lease. When the priestly leaseholders refused to cleanse the temple of thieves, they forfeited their right to represent God. God demonstrated this by tearing down the temple in A.D. 70.

The argument between Jesus and the Jews from beginning of His ministry to the end had centered on the temple. He invoked the language of the temple to describe the resurrection. Immediately following His first scattering of the moneychangers, the Jews asked Him for a sign to validate this authority. "Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2:18–22). The Jews remembered this at the time of His trial, even though the disciples had temporarily forgotten. "And there arose certain [men], and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together" (Mark 14:57–59).

Which temple was doomed to permanent destruction? Jesus' body or the temple? At the resurrection, the world had half of its answer. In A.D. 70, the world had the other half.

Conclusion

The temple was a house of prayer. By using the sacred authority of the temple to establish monopolistic pricing, the priests and the moneychangers had profaned the temple, i.e., had violated sacred space. Jesus drove out the moneychangers because they were thieves. It was not the fact that there was exchange going on that outraged Him. It was convenient for men to buy unblemished beasts to sacrifice. It was convenient that they could buy coins acceptable in worship. But the moneychangers had become thieves, exploiting their delegated position as agents of the priesthood. Their corruption reflected the priesthood's corruption. Jesus drive them out.

The top priority established in this passage is to avoid using God's holy office of ecclesiastical minister as a means of exploiting worshippers. When men seek church offices to gain income based on a misuse of authority, they violate this rule. Paul wrote: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous" (I Tim. 3:2–3).[13] This is an extension of the top priority in this passage. Men who misuse God's holy office by stealing will be driven out.

13. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

43

CONFISCATION IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

MATTHEW 21:33–39

The theocentric principle here was the sovereignty of God over inheritance. God is the creator. He sets the terms of the leasehold. His Son, Jesus Christ, is the true heir in history and eternity. This was the issue of inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. The Davidic Inheritance

Jesus gave this parable to the religious leaders in the week preceding Passover. The people had strewn palm branches before Him as He entered the Jerusalem. They had acclaimed Him as the heir of David. "And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:9). This was a

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1988] 2012), ch. 5.

messianic declaration. Jacob had prophesied: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). No Jewish king had reigned in Israel since the Assyrian captivity. No Jewish king had reigned in Judah since the Babylonian captivity. Yet the crowds were proclaiming Jesus the son of David. They were acknowledging that He was Shiloh, "and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Jesus had the right to wear the sword of Judah. So said the Jewish masses.

This declaration offended the Jewish rulers. "And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased" (Matt. 21:15). They sought to entrap Him by forcing Him to declare this authority, and then place Him under sanctions for blasphemy, as they did a week later. "And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" (Matt. 21:23).

As He did so often, and with such devastating effect, He answered their question with a question: "I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things" (Matt. 21:24b–27). They feared being placed under the public's sanctions. So, they could not pursue Him by means of this strategy. He escaped from their trap once again.

The people had declared Him the heir of David's office. This threatened the Jewish establishment, which had a working alliance with Rome. David had been the great warrior king of Israel. If the multitude ordained Jesus as king, this could undermine the Jewish establishment's arrangement. It was clear to Pilate a week later that this was what bothered them. He understood that it was not religion that had motivated them, but politics. He also understood that Jesus was uninterested in politics, for He was self-consciously unbending to power. He was not afraid of Pilate or his sanctions. Jesus stood His ground with Pilate, and Pilate respected Him for this.

> Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar (John 19:10–15).

The Jewish rulers crawled before Rome's power at the expense of their theology. Jesus had challenged Pilate in terms of His theology. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." Jesus told him that God was over him, and therefore the man who had delivered Him to Pilate—presumably, the chief priest—had the greater sin. Why? Because the chief priest's theology declared that God is in control, yet he had brought Pilate into this religious dispute because Pilate possessed the civil power of execution.

Pilate recognized the nature of the game that the Jewish rulers were playing, with him as the pawn. They were placing him between the rock and the hard place: either do their bidding or face public disorder which would undermine his reputation in Rome. As a politician, he recognized the political nature of what the priests were doing at his expense. They were painting him into a corner. Jesus had verbally put him in his place in terms of biblical authority, which Pilate did not respect, but Jesus was not trying to use him for His purposes. The priests were, and they invoked Roman politics in their manipulation: "We have no king but Caesar." Politicians do not like to be manipulated by other politicians. Pilate therefore preferred to let Jesus go. So, when he finally capitulated to the Jewish rulers for the sake of Roman politics, he gained symbolic revenge. "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the

Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written" (John 19:19–22). He thereby publicly announced that Jesus was the heir to David's throne, and he, Pilate, had smashed it. Rome got the credit, not the Jewish politicians. This greatly annoyed the Jewish politicians, which was Pilate's goal.

B. Stealing the Inheritance

Jesus' parable of the owner of the vineyard rested on the Bible's theology of inheritance. An only son would inherit all of his father's property. This was not simply a matter of preserving a family's wealth. Far more important, it was a matter of preserving a man's name in Israel. What we call the levirate marriage law reveals the importance of a firstborn son's preservation of a man's name. "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel" (Deut. 25:5–6). Brothers who shared the same landed inheritance shared more than land. They shared mutual responsibility to preserve each other's name through procreation. The land that was part of the dead brother's inheritance would go to the firstborn son who was fathered by the surviving brother. This biological son would carry the dead brother's name. None of the land inherited by this son from the dead brother would be shared, at his death, with the heirs of the biological half-brothers born to his biological father. Family name was more important than bloodline inheritance in Israel.[2]

The owner in the parable had funded the planting of the vineyard. He then leased it out to people whose task was to care for it. He then went on a far journey. The imagery here is obvious: it is a recapitulation of Eden. The main difference is, the owner went on a far journey, not a morning excursion, as God did in the garden. The husbandmen could expect payment for their services, but only when the crop came in.

They cared for the vineyard. The issue was not the quality of their labor. It was the quality of their morals. They were thieves and murderers. They were intent on building up an inheritance of their own. But they had none. They had not funded the planting of the vineyard. It was not their land. They were hired hands. This inheritance be-

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

longed to the owner's son.

This legal arrangement offended the hired hands. After all, had they not remained in the field, in good weather and bad? Had not they remained on duty, defending the vineyard from predators, whether human or otherwise? Had they not invested years in the building up of the property? Did they not have an independent legal claim to part of the crop? To a large part of the crop? To all of the crop? To all future crops? Of course they did, they thought. And there was no one to tell them differently.

Then the harvest season approached, and the owner sent his servants home to administer the harvest and the distribution of the crop. The hired hands beat them and stoned them. He sent more servants. The same thing happened. Then he sent his son. This time, the hired hands saw a great opportunity: to collect not just the crop but the entire inheritance. "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him" (vv. 38B–39).

Jesus then asked the rulers of Israel to render public judgment on the literary hired hands. "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons" (Matt. 21:40–41). What Jesus did here was what Nathan had done to David. He told a story and asked those in authority to render judgment. As in the case of Nathan's judicial challenge, the targets condemned themselves. And, like Nathan, Jesus wasted no time in declaring the judicial equivalent of "thou art the man." "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. 21:42–44).

With these words, the lawful heir of David's throne surrendered His claims to that throne and all of the associated inheritance. He transferred the kingdom to another nation, the church. Shiloh had come, and with His advent, as Jacob had prophesied, the sword was removed forever from Judah. That was because it was removed forever from Israel.

The parable was about a forced disinheritance: *disinheritance by illegal execution*. The judicial solution, the Jewish rulers understood, was the execution of the hired hands and the transfer of administrative responsibilities to new employees. But there was a crucial problem with this solution: the absence of heirs. The solution might solve the management problem; it could not solve the inheritance problem. The priests assumed that the father was still alive, as the parable indicated. But where would the owner get another son? The answer should have been obvious: by adoption.

The new heirs would care for the vineyard. They would not be hired hands. As adopted sons, they would have a stake in the inheritance. They would share the harvest. The gentiles would inherit.

But was not Israel the true son? Jesus had already lured them into publicly forfeiting any legal claim to that office. "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:28–32). The gentiles had long refused to go into the vineyard, but they were now about to go. The Jews had said they would go, but now they refused. The true son does the will of his father. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10).

C. His or Ours?

1. Hired Hands

The hired hands asserted a claim of ownership. Standing between them and this claim was the owner, who was far away, and his servants, who were no match for the hired hands, and the son. The son was the least of their problems, as long as the owner stayed away. But, of course, he would not stay away, once word of his son's murder came to him. The rulers had understood this: "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They

say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." In the matter of power, the hired hands were superior to the servants and the son, but the owner was armed and dangerous.

The hired hands decided to confiscate the inheritance by killing the heir. In the name of the people—the workers of the world—they united to kill the son. When they did this, they secured their own judgment. They would not retain their stolen goods indefinitely. The owner would come and destroy them. But they did not foresee this. They did not believe that he would return from the far country. They were fools.

2. Darwinism

The twentieth century, more than any in history, was the century of the rebellious hired hands. Because they adopted the Darwinian view of God, voters became convinced that the cosmic owner of the vineyard is not even in a far country; He is a figment of superstitious men's imaginations. Within a quarter century of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), Lester Frank Ward wrote *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), which asserted the right and obligation of the state's scientific planners to direct society, including the economy, into evolutionary progress. By 1900, this view of central planning had captured the minds of the leading intellectuals.[3] The Progressive movement in the United States and the social democracy movement in Europe invoked Darwinism as the model for, and justification of, centralized economic planning.

Social planning requires power. It also requires funds. Through state power, social planners have laid their hands on other people's money. They have transferred the inheritance of families into the coffers of the state. Taxation grew 10-fold or more in the twentieth century. The Bible-based observation that God has placed restrictions on lawful taxation—less than 10% of one's income (I Sam. 8:15, 17)—is greeted with hoots of derision, not only from social Darwinists but from Christian professors of social science, who have publicly baptized the recommendations of social Darwinism. "Don't give us that Old Testament stuff!" the Christian professors insist. What they really mean is, "Give us a state that taxes us at 40% of our income, twice

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A.

the rate that Pharaoh extracted from the Egyptians." They call this "economic democracy." It is based on a revision of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

The suggestion that the Bible sets forth as binding a private property social order is rejected without detailed consideration of what the Bible teaches.

3. Wiser Than God[4]

The vast majority of Christians have always believed that they can improve on the Mosaic law. On their own authority, they revise God's law by coming to conclusions in the name of God that deny the specific teachings of God's revealed law. Then they proclaim their annulment-through-interpretation as being in conformity with "the true spirit of God's law" or "the underlying principles of God's law." As part of this improvement, they reject the binding authority of God's law. In doing so, they necessarily become advocates of some system of law proposed by one or another group of covenant-breakers. They refuse to ask themselves the obvious question: "If not God's law, then what?" They refuse to deal with the ethical question: "By what *other* standard?"[5]

As an example, consider the assertion of John Gladwin, a defender of central planning, who later became a bishop in the Anglican Church. In a chapter in a book devoted to Christian economics, he rejected the concept of the Bible as a source of authoritative economic guidelines or blueprints. In fact, he assured us, it is unbiblical to search for biblical guidelines for economics. "It is unhelpful as well as unbiblical to look to the Bible to give us a blueprint of economic theory or structure which we then apply to our contemporary life. We must rather work in a theological way, looking to the Bible to give us experience and insight into the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. This then helps us discover values and methods of interpretation which we can use in understanding our present social experience."[6] Furthermore, "There is in Scripture no blueprint of the ideal state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state

4. The following passage is taken from North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 62:B.

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991).

6. John Gladwin, "A Centralist Response," in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 124.

and national economy."[7] He contrasted biblical law unfavorably with theology. He then goes on to praise the welfare state as an application of theological, rather than legal, insights.[8] Theology informs us that "there is no escape from the need for large-scale state activity if our society is to move into a more equitable future at social and economic levels."[9] Clearly, neither the Mosaic law nor the New Testament teaches this, but theology supposedly does. Whose theology? Reinhold Niebuhr's.[10]

So, we are assured, there are no authoritative economic guidelines or economic blueprints in the Bible. On the other hand, there are numerous vague and non-specific ethical principles which just about any Christian social theorist can invoke when promoting his recommended reconstruction of society. All it requires to baptize socialism is a series of nice-sounding pat phrases taken from the book of theological liberalism, which Gladwin offered in profusion: "the bounds of Christian principles of human concern," "the righteousness revealed to us in God himself," "the good," "structural framework of law and social values," "gross and deepening disparities in social experience," "spontaneity of love," "the light of the gospel," and "the most humane principles of social order."[11]

Lest you imagine that Gladwin is an aberration, consider the fact that the two other anti-free market essayists in the book adopted the same anti-blueprint hermeneutics. William Diehl, a defender of Keynesianism's state-guided economy, confidently affirmed: "The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it in another way."[12] Art Gish, a defender of small communities of Christians who hold property in common, informed us that "Since koinonia includes the participation of everyone involved,

7. Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," *ibid*., p. 183.

8. *Ibid*., pp. 125–26

9. Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," *ibid*., p. 193.

10. *Ibid*., p. 197. He cited *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). It is an odd book to cite. It was written by the author in reaction against his youthful fling with Marxism, a book in which he proclaimed that Jesus "did not dwell upon the social consequences of these moral actions, because he viewed them from an inner and a transcendent perspective." Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner's, [1932] 1960), p. 264.

11. See my critique in *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 200.

12. William Diehl, "The Guided-Market System, *ibid*., p. 87.

there is no blueprint for what this would look like on a global scale. . . . We are talking about a process, not final answers."[13]

The fact that these statements appear in a book on Christian economics should come as no surprise. These comments are typical of the opinions of humanist-educated Christian intellectuals. Christians who have spent their lives in humanist educational institutions, and who then have fed their minds on a steady diet of humanist publications, in most cases have adopted the worldview of one or another variety of humanism. They have felt emotionally compelled to baptize their adopted worldview with a few religious-sounding phrases. But just because someone keeps repeating "koinonia, koinonia" as a Christian mantra does not prove that his recommended policies of common ownership will actually produce koinonia.[14] What produces peace, harmony, and increasing per capita output is widespread faithfulness to God's law.

It is unwise to attempt to become wiser than God. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Cor. 1:25). This is why it is our job to become familiar with God's Bible-revealed law. Biblical law, not the latest academic fad, is to be our guide, generation after generation.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter is the primary conclusion of this 31-volume commentary. It is this: *a private property social order is mandated by*

13. Art Gish, "Decentralist Economics," *ibid*., p. 154.

14. If you wonder what "koinonia" means, you are probably not a left-wing advocate of common ownership. Understand, I am not suggesting that voluntary common ownership is anti-Christian, any more than I am saying that voluntary celibacy is anti-Christian. Paul recommended celibacy (I Cor. 7:32–33). He did so, he said, because of "the present distress" (v. 26). Similarly, the Jerusalem church held property in common (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Shortly thereafter, a great persecution of the church began. The entire church fled the city, except for the apostles (Acts 8:1). This exodus created the first foreign missions program in church history: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The fact that they had sold their property enabled them to leave the city without looking back, as Lot's wife had looked back. So, for temporary purposes in times of great trial, voluntary celibacy and voluntary common ownership are legitimate, even wise. But to make either practice a recommended institutional model for all times and places is a misuse of historical events. The one institution where common ownership has been productive for longer than one generation is the monastery. However, it takes celibacy to make this system work for longer than a few years. As soon as there is a wife saying, "He's earning as much as you are, but you're far more productive," koinonia ends. In the modern state of Israel, the kibbutz collective farms faded rapidly as important sources of national production.

biblical law. Whenever biblical law is enforced, free market capitalism has to develop. Modern fundamentalists in the pews generally believe in capitalism, but they do not believe that biblical civil law is still valid. So, their defense of capitalism implicitly rests on some baptized version of secular epistemology, whether natural law (Adam Smith), natural rights (Murray Rothbard), Kantianism (Ludwig von Mises), or empiricism (Milton Friedman). Meanwhile, the neo-evangelicals go off to college and come back mostly confused.[15]

The top priority in this parable is honoring the rights of ownership. As surely as men should honor the God of creation and His Son, so should they honor God's ownership of this world and His delegation of stewardship to his servants. *Delegated ownership is the basis of maintaining the kingdom grant*. The state has no legitimate claim that matches the church's: the tithe.[16] But modern Christians, wiser than God, have dismissed the tithe as "Old Testament stuff," and have wound up paying less than a tithe to the church and four times a tithe to the civil government. God is not mocked.

God's judgment will surely come on this society of murderous, thieving hired hands. "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:26–27). When this happens, Christians had better be well prepared in advance for the collapse of the hired hands' Darwinian order. They had better not be dependent on it. But most of them will be. They live under a regime that rests on taxation twice as confiscatory as Pharaoh's, and their academic spokesmen praise it as democratic capitalism. These people view democracy as a system whereby two wolves and a lamb vote to decide what to have for lunch.

15. Ronald J. Sider is probably the best example. Compare the first edition of his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), with the 1997 edition. For my comparison, see *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F.

16. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

44

RENDERING UNTO CAESAR AND GOD

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

MATTHEW 22:15–22

The theocentric principle here was the distinction between God's ownership and man's. Men owe God for the use of His goods, in the same way that they owe the government for services rendered. If the state has the power to enforce payment, surely God does, too. This was the issue of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Tribute Money

Accompanying the Pharisees were Herodians, a priestly party allied with the Sadducees.[2] Herod was the regional monarch. He was under Rome's authority. He was an Idumean, meaning an heir of Esau.[3]

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. "Herodians," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), IV, p. 360.

3. "Herod," *Columbia Encyclopedia*, 5th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press,

Those who were allied to Herod were normally not friends of the Pharisees. But Jesus was a problem for both groups. He was undermining their authority. The two groups joined forces on the assumption that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"—until the enemy is removed. Jesus recognized the nature of this temporary alliance and warned His disciples against both groups.[4] Forty years later, the Idumeans joined forces with the Jews to resist Rome, then turned on the Jews when the siege of Jerusalem began. They looted the Jews. Titus slew some and sold an "immense" number of them into slavery after the city fell.[5]

The Pharisees sought to entrap Jesus. The Romans were hated by the Jews. Roman rule was regarded as tyrannical. If Jesus could be lured into acknowledging the legitimacy of Roman rule, He would lose favor with the Jews, for they resented this rule. They paid their taxes, but they did so grudgingly. On the other hand, if He denied the legitimacy of taxation by Rome, the Herodians would surely report this to the Roman authorities. He would be trapped, or so they imagined.

They began with flattery: "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men." In other words, "Say your piece loud and clear, sucker; then we'll be rid of you forever." Jesus was not fooled. He identified them for what they were: "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" The hypocrite feigns righteousness but in fact is a sinner.

He asked them to show him a coin. "Shew me the tribute money." They brought it to Him. At that point, He had them trapped. The "penny" was a denarius. This was a coin used specifically to pay taxes. If taxes were not legitimate, why did his critics possess one? Furthermore, it bore an image. It also had an inscription. The inscription invoked the language of divinity. The Jews regarded this as idolatrous. But they had brought Him a coin. What were they doing with such coins?[6]

Jesus asked them specifically: Whose image? Whose inscription? Caesar's, they answered. What else could they say? "Then saith he

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1993). See also, "Edom."

4. "And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15).

5. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI:VIII:2.

6. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), ch. 8. (Reprinted by Wipf & Stock, 2008.)

unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." By acknowledging that they possessed a tax coin, they were also acknowledging that Rome brought civil order. Such order must be paid for. If Caesar's image and inscription were on the coin, then those who used such coins in trade were gaining a benefit: money. By using money to gain what they wanted to buy rather than bartering, they were extending the division of labor. This increases men's output per unit of resource input. It makes them wealthier.

Caesar's rule had brought social stability. It had created international legal framework for economic growth. It was Rome, not Israel, that had built the highways and had cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates. There are no free lunches, and Rome was merely collecting what belonged to it. Jesus was saying that the benefits of economic growth had to be paid for. The beneficiaries owed something to the state.

A coin was a mark of state sovereignty in the ancient world. It still is. The theology of Rome was visible on Rome's coins. The image and the inscription announced the divinity of the emperor: "Emperor Tiberius august Son of the august God."[7] This is what angered the Jews. But the agents of the Pharisees or their Herodian allies had such a coin in their possession. The Herodians were content with the coins. The Herod of Jesus' infancy had been a ruthless tax collector.[8] But the Pharisees were indeed hypocrites. This is why Jesus said a bit later, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).[9]

Jesus was not arguing that Caesar owned everything that he laid claim to. On the contrary, men are to render to God what God possesses. What Caesar owned was legal sovereignty over the political system that provided the Roman Empire's money. This legal system had to be supported by taxes. Israel was benefitting from this system, despite the system's inequities. Besides, Israel was under judgment, and had been since the captivity. Living under foreign domination was nothing new for Israel. Rome had brought greater trade and prosperity by opening up new markets. Israel was benefitting from the arrangement. On what basis should Israelites have refused to pay

7. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.
9. Chapter 46.

taxes? Jesus had the answer: none. But He gave this answer in such a way that the Pharisees could not embarrass Him.

B. What Belongs to God

The Israelites' tithe money went to support the priests. The priests were Sadducees, the Pharisees' rivals.[10] By reminding the people of their obligations to God, Jesus was undermining the authority of the Pharisees. He was reminding them that they owed a tithe. This meant that they owed God by way of the Sadducees' faction. This was a public challenge to the Pharisees.

Jesus used this incident to lay the foundation for a comprehensive covenant lawsuit against Israel. God is owed far more than the tithe, He warned them, and they had not paid God what He was owed. Judgment was coming.

> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Matt. 23:23–36).[11]

10. Herbert Danby, Introduction, *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. xiii.

11. Any Christian who argues, as so many do, that confrontational language is not

Jesus passed the dilemma back to the Pharisees. If they denied Rome's right of taxation, they risked political suppression by Rome. If they affirmed this right, they would have undermined their popularity with the more radical factions of the people. If they affirmed the tithe, they also had to affirm the Sadducee party. If they denied the tithe, they had to oppose Moses. So, they went away . . . again. Jesus had successfully silenced them, just as they had sought to silence Him . . . again.

C. Tithes and Taxes

The tithe is mandatory. It preceded the Mosaic law. Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20). There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this law has been annulled. Only the recipients have changed: from the local Levites to the local churches. Through Christ, the church is the heir of the Melchizedekan priesthood. "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:5–6). "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace" (Heb. 6:20–7:2). Covenant-keepers owe the local church their tithes.[12]

What do they owe the state? Less than a tithe. Any system of civil government that takes as much as 10% is tyrannical, Samuel warned.

> And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And

Christian has not come to grips with this passage's rhetoric. When the self-assured critic has this passage pointed out to him, the standard response is: "Well, you're not Jesus." This is quite true, but the critic may well be Pharisaical.

12. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010). Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

> he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day" (I Sam. 8:11–18).

The Israelites refused to heed this warning (v. 19). In the twentieth century, Christians did not cry out when the state extracted four times the tithe or even more from them. They lived under what the Bible clearly identifies as tyranny, yet they called it democratic liberty. What roused their ire was any suggestion that they owed a tithe to their local churches. "We're under grace, not law!" they proclaimed. In fact, they were under pagan law, pagan bureaucrats, pagan tax collectors, and pagan lawyers. This has yet to change.

Pagans have denied that the Old Testament applies to modern times. Christians have agreed. Pagans have asserted the sovereignty of the state to extract money far beyond the tithe. Christians have agreed. Pagans have affirmed the right of the tax collector to require comprehensive income records from every taxpayer. Christians have agreed. Yet any suggestion that a church's officers possess a similar right would be met with total opposition by church members. No one suggests that such authority is possessed by the church. Well, not quite. No one other than me. I argue that every *voting* church member must prove that he tithes, and this requires him to submit such records to the elders.[13] But no one agrees with me. Protestant churches offer voting membership to any adult who joins. Non-tithing members are given the right to vote for leaders who will decide how to spend the church's money.

D. Revolt: Tax or Tithe

If it is wrong for the state to collect taxes beyond the tithe, is it right for citizens to revolt when taxes exceed the tithe? Not if they can change the law legally. Not if they can legally beat the tax system individually. A tyranny involves more than high levels of taxation. Tax rates identify a tyranny, but tyranny is a package deal. The Bible identifies as rebellious every civil government that does not acknowledge the God of the Bible as sovereign. But the solution is not

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

armed revolt; the answer is evangelism, followed by the invocation of a new civil covenant. A new personal covenant is only the beginning of the Great Commission. The long-term goal is a new civil covenant. This is an implication of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).[14]

Jesus told His followers to obey the Pharisees, even though He knew that they taught men's traditions rather than the Mosaic law. "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matt. 23:1–4). He knew the religious leaders were hypocrites; nevertheless, He told His followers to obey them. Why? Because the Old Covenant had not yet been annulled historically. The temple still stood. Until the sacrificial fires were extinguished forever, the religious leaders possessed legitimate authority. The Christians would have to wait for deliverance. It came in A.D. 70.[15]

There is no need to rush when it comes to throwing off a self-imposed tyranny. God will eventually destroy it. His people must work to replace it, not through violence, but through principled non-violent resistance and political mobilization. (Educating their children with an explicitly Christian curriculum is basic to such a strategy.) The apostles refused to obey when told not to preach the gospel (Acts. 5:29), but they willingly suffered the consequences of this disobedience. "[A]nd when they [the Jewish council] had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:40b–42).

14. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

15. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997).

Conclusion

Jesus made it clear that the state is entitled to taxes. He implied that the church is entitled to money. If we do not turn to the Old Testament to find out what the limits of taxes and church contributions are, we shall forever be caught between the tax collector and the church in their quest for funding. The Old Testament provides information on these limits. For the church, the limit is 10% of our net income. For the state, the limit is less than 10%. The state does not have the right before God to extract from residents as high a percentage as the church has the right to demand of its voting members. Any state that demands as much as 10% is a tyranny. The total level of taxation, from local civil government upward, must be less than 10% of a person's net income.

The modern church does not believe this. The result is a church that does not have the courage to demand tithes of its voting members, and a state that cannot resist extracting at least four times more than the tithe. Christians have sought to starve God's church by refusing to tithe. Meanwhile, the messianic state extracts their wealth unmercifully. God is not mocked.

The top priority in this passage is social budgeting based on the Bible. The Bible identifies what God is legally entitled to and what the state is legally entitled to. This, the modern world has refused to acknowledge. The result in our day is the widespread acceptance of the welfare state. The end result of this is personal dependence on the state and eventual economic and social bankruptcy.

45

COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

MATTHEW 22:37–40

The theocentric focus of this passage was the law of God. The Ten Commandments rest on the authority of the mandatory love of God and our neighbors. This was a matter of extending grace: point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. The Love of God

We usually think of the love of God as a downward phenomenon. We should think, "What comes down should go up." Love is our response. But this love is judicial. We are to obey God and deal justly with our neighbors.

The famous phrase, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is preceded by a more fundamental phrase: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." The command to love our neighbor appears in Leviticus: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:18). The command to love God appears in Deuteronomy. "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5). The context of the Leviticus passage is civil justice.[2] The context of the Deuteronomy passage is inheritance in the Promised Land.[3] We begin by loving God.

Jesus here confirmed the Decalogue in terms of two Old Testament passages. He did not argue that the Decalogue is no longer legally or morally binding in the New Covenant era. On the contrary, He validated the Decalogue by citing as authoritative the two passages in the Old Testament. Through His validation, Christians can be certain of the authoritative, binding nature of the Ten Commandments today. It is the mark of theological heresy to argue, as some have, that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding because of their close—a word left undefined—connection with the Mosaic law, which supposedly was completely annulled by the New Covenant. Jesus Christ undermined such an argument by saying that the Ten Commandments were grounded judicially on these two commands to love God and man, which are permanently binding in history.

The consequence and evidence of our love of God is our love for our neighbor. This is New Testament doctrine as well as Old Testament doctrine. It applies to interpersonal relationships within the Christian community as well as to relationships with people outside the church. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (I John 4:20–21).

Jesus gave this summary of the law in response to a question from a lawyer. In Luke's account, the lawyer responded, "And who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29b). Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan as His reply.[4] The answer focused on charity shown by a righteous foreigner to a man who had fallen on hard times on the same road to Jericho. Our neighbor is someone who is traveling down the same road that we are. The question is: How wide a road is it, and how long?

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2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 16.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 15.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 21.

B. The Judicial Context

The command to love one's neighbor, first and foremost, mandates equal treatment before the civil law. This command has many other applications, but it begins with civil justice. This is not where most modern commentators begin their expositions. They do not think judicially, which means that they do not think covenantally. They do not begin their analysis of Jesus' words with a detailed study of the context of the original commandment. The context of the Leviticus passage is judicial. It appears in a section that sets forth rules that govern the enforcement of civil law.

> Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:15–18).

This passage reinforces a fundamental biblical concept: equality before the law.[5] The Bible repeatedly forbids judges to respect persons in administering justice.

> Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it (Deut. 1:17).

> Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous (Deut. 16:19).

> Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts (II Chron. 19:7).

> These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment (Prov. 24:23).

> Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).

> For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:11).

5. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 14.

The rule of biblical civil law meant that all residents in Israel were supposed to receive justice, even if they were not citizens or even Israelites. This testified to God as a universal God with universal standards. The nation was to execute civil laws impartially on all residents. There would be protection for strangers.

This predictability of civil law was designed to reduce the cost of production in Israel. Participants in the market knew that private ownership would be defended by the civil government. Theft through economic oppression was not allowed (Ex. 22:21–24;[6] Deut. 24:14–15[7]). Instead of spending time and money to defend property, producers could re-direct this capital to improve the quality of goods and services, or lowering their prices, or both. Predictable law promotes economic growth by reducing uncertainty.

C. The Economic and Social Context

The law prohibiting respect of persons also applied to relationships between masters and servants. "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" (Eph. 6:9). Within the church, the same rule has applied. "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2:9). The context of this injunction was discrimination in the church against poorer members.

> For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors (James 2:2–9).

Historically, the practice of self-conscious discrimination in churches has been associated with seating. James' words indicate this. "Ye have

6. *Ibid*., Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 48.
7. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 61.

respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool." A practice begun in Anglo-American churches in the eighteenth century was to rent pews to families. The poor had to sit on the floor or in the back or in a balcony. Pew rentals continued sporadically into the second half of the twentieth century.[8]

Protestant churches have unofficially but universally dealt with this problem by voluntarily and unself-consciously dividing in terms of family income. There is a hierarchy of denominations in terms of family income. In the United States, at the top of the income ladder are Episcopalians. This denomination is by far the most liberal theologically. Below the Episcopalians are mainline Presbyterians. Below them are Lutherans. Baptists are below Lutherans. At the bottom of the income ladder among whites are pentecostal congregations. These are by far the most conservative associations theologically. The move toward theological conservatism parallels the move toward low income.

Racial segregation is unofficial but universal. Blacks and Mexican-Americans are at the bottom of the income ladder.

No civil law in the United States formally compels such a distribution. In fact, any civil law that officially attempted to do this would be declared unconstitutional. There are other laws, however, that tend to structure communities, called zoning laws, and these are usually legal. A local zoning commission establishes rules for construction. These rules re-direct capital and people into certain parts of the community. Zoning substitutes political compulsion for market allocation. But it seems to be an unbreakable law of society that there will never be homogeneous distribution of anything that is scarce. Some win and some lose in the competition for scarce resources.

The range of income within a modern Protestant congregation is vastly less than the range of income of worldwide society. The range is reduced as we move from nations to regions to cities to neighborhoods. There is no escape from this process of narrowing. It is part of a much wider context, which today is called clustering.

Neighborhoods are divided even more rigorously and more finely in terms of income. The degree to which this is true was not under-

8. For an example of an Episcopal Church parish with pew rents in the 1960s, see St. Mark's in Philadelphia. The by-laws were changed in 1957 to abolish new pew rents, but existing rentals were maintained. saintmarksphiladelphia.org/sermons/2009/10/11/pew-rent.html (accessed January 16, 2021).

stood until the combination of modern computers, nine-digit postal zip codes (in the United States), government census reports, mapping technology, and direct-marketing techniques made possible precise neighborhood income and affinity studies. This marketing-demographic strategy is called clustering. As of 1995, there were at least 60 different income/social classifications. These firms rent demographic information to direct-mail companies and other marketing organizations. Statistically significant differences in response rates in each of these neighborhood classifications allows the firm and its competitors to rent this information to marketers, who will pay for it in order to save money in marketing goods and services to targeted groups.

No government planning agency created these measurable clusters of residents. No one knew that this many categories existed until after the results of the 1990 census were published and analyzed. The number of identifiable clusters increased by 50% as a result of the 1990 census.[9] There is no question that the number of clusters will increase as demographic sampling technology improves.

People somehow sense where they fit most comfortably when they pick a neighborhood to live. No one knows how people make these assessments. There is no known means of perception. All that the demographers know for certain is that these clusters exist. These clusters reveal statistically significant residence patterns—significant enough for marketers to buy the information.

The early church faced analogous distributions of income among its members. There have always been economically identifiable neighborhoods in towns. As the number of congregations grew in New Testament times, and as the distance between them grew, patterns of membership would have reflected differences in income. There are always rich and poor within any congregation, but the range of income in any congregation is far less than the range of all congregations within a city. This was also true in James' day, though of course with fewer divisions in a lower division of labor society. But in the huge city of Rome, there would have been many clusters.

D. A Matter of Taste[10]

The humanist has a problem with the moral injunction to love our neighbor as ourselves. The problem was best stated in George Bernard Shaw's play, *Man and Superman* (1903): "Do not do unto others

9. Susan Mitchell, "Birds of a Feather," *American Demographics* (Feb. 1995).
10. This appeared first in North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 53:B.

as you would they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same." There is an implicit lawlessness in this, as he says forthrightly in the same play: "The golden rule is that there are no golden rules." If each man is autonomous, and therefore utterly unconnected with other men by feelings and interpretations, then life is anarchy. But on the basis of the logic of autonomous man, there is no sure reason to believe that there are such connections. It may be convenient to believe that there are, if only to make sense of reality, but there is no way to prove that empathy serves as a means of unifying mankind.

But there is a link, the Bible tells us: the image of God in man. Man is made in God's image, and he is therefore responsible to God covenantally with respect to his own life and the creation, which is entrusted to him by God, which is basic to man's definition as man(-Gen. 1:26–28).[11] There are common emotional and ethical bonds in all men. These bonds can be actively suppressed, in the same way that the knowledge of God is actively suppressed by sinful men (Rom. 1:18–22).[12] Nevertheless, these bonds serve as the basis of social cooperation, which in turn requires people to make ethical judgments.

The Israelites were reminded that they had been strangers in Egypt. "Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9). They should therefore not imitate their tyrannical captors by imposing unrighteous judgments on those who are under their God-given authority. If they should do so, then God will remove this authority from them and punish them in the same way. To escape God's temporal covenantal judgments, men must obey God's law. *They must subordinate themselves to this law in order lawfully to execute righteous judgment on those beneath them*. As they do unto others, so will God do to them.

Then what about differing tastes? What about using our feelings as guides for dealing with others? If tastes are ethically random, or even ethically neutral, how can we rely on introspection as a guide to external behavior? The biblical response is clear: tastes are neither random nor ethically neutral. Tastes are inherent in men as God's creatures, although this testimony can be suppressed and twisted to covenant-breaking purposes. Because of sin, tastes must be governed by the standards of God's law.

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11. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3–4.

12. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

E. A Common Humanity

The image of God in man is the basis of common tastes. Ethical systems rely on some theory of a common humanity. The Bible provides the basis of this common humanity: the fatherhood of God. Paul preached at Athens,

> God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring (Acts 17:24–28).

Men are responsible for dealing in love with other men. This means that men should deal honestly with others, truthfully, and without malice. They are to treat others as they wish to be treated. They begin with self-awareness. They then move to an awareness of others' behavior in response to their own actions. Sin has marred men's awareness and their self-control, but the standard is fixed: to love neighbors as ourselves.

This does not mean that negative sanctions are banned. We want the best for ourselves, and we know that this requires negative sanctions. We deal with our children by means of negative sanctions. We enforce the law. So, treating others in love is not the same as ignoring every affront or turning the other cheek to oppressors when resistance is called for.[13]

F. Cooperation and Competition as Correlative

In economic transactions, buyers and sellers benefit when they deal honestly with each other. The greater their cooperation, the better off both parties are. Honesty really is the best policy, as Ben Franklin wrote so many years ago. The greater the love—honest dealing—the greater the likelihood of a completed transaction. This increases the division of labor.

As for competition, sellers compete against sellers, and buyers against buyers. As a buyer and a seller move closer to a transaction,

13. Chapter 9.

the about-to-be-excluded buyers and the about-to-be-excluded sellers face growing competition. This is inescapable. Competition is the other side of cooperation. An increase in competition is beneficial for society, for it teaches buyers and sellers how to cooperate with each other more effectively.

The economic goal is cooperation: a completed transaction between a buyer and a seller. The correlative effect of cooperation is competition: sellers vs. sellers, buyers vs. buyers. Competition is beneficial because it makes available better opportunities for buyers and sellers. Imitators learn what works to complete a transaction.

The moral threat is that the quest to cooperate, buyer and seller, can lead to an increased concern to impose losses on competitors. The seller's motivation should be "serve the customer." It can turn into "ruin my competitor." Christ's words focus on the former. The buyer's motivation should be "reward the most efficient seller." It should not be "keep ahead of other buyers." The economic effect of sin in a free market economy is to shift our motivation to the defeat of our competitors. One result is improved service for customers. One great advantage of the free market is to extract social benefits from personal sin.[14] The economic effect of love in a free market economy is to shift men's motivation to improving their condition through cooperation in a division of labor economy.

Perhaps we can understand this correlative relationship more clearly through an analogy: courtship. When a man and a woman move closer to marriage, each by pleasing the other, the about-to-be-excluded rivals of both sexes face increased competition. The exclusionary aspect of marriage creates inherently competitive courtships. The proper goal of the couple is to please God by pleasing the other. If either of them has as the chief goal the exclusion of some rival, the marriage will have problems. The goal should not be to make life more unpleasant for a rival suitor. The goal is to please the one being courted. But this process may involve making a self-conscious assessment of the strengths of one or more rivals and overcoming these strengths.

One of the worst aspects of games is that there must be winners and losers. Without winners, there would not be games. But games

14. The awareness of this aspect of the free market goes back to Adam Smith, and even earlier, to the book by Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees; or Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714). Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed.(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), Appendix C.

are played only for the enjoyment of creating winners and losers. This is not true of the free market. There are constant winners and losers in free market competition, but the context of competition is not a game played for its own sake, but rather the cooperative overcoming of limits in the environment. The division of labor helps men to overcome these limits. Cooperation is central; competition is the by-product. In a game, competition is central; team cooperation is a by-product. Inherently, games are structured in terms of the destructive side of man.[15] Sports also have this characteristic feature. Competition in sports can lead to aesthetically remarkable performances, such as we see in ice skating, but the personal goal of the athlete is always the forced exclusion of all competitors. The goal of the game is "winner take all or almost all." The goal of the free market is not. It is the satisfaction of buyers and sellers through voluntary cooperation.

Conclusion

Jesus taught that the love of God leads to the love of one's neighbor. So did the Old Testament. The original Mosaic context of the law to love your neighbor was judicial: civil justice. The principle applies to every area of social life, including economics. In economics, it leads to the ideal of service. In a free market social order, efficient service to customers is what produces profits. The free market social order is a system that produces mutual benefits through cooperation.

The inescapable by-product of cooperation is the exclusion of competitors, but it is a by-product. Even here, the by-product is productive: better service of future customers through the reallocation of capital to customer-satisfying competitors. The free market converts an evil—the desire to displace one's rivals—into a benefit: the quest to serve customers better.

15. I say this with a distinct bias. I have rarely enjoyed games, and I have for many years refused to play them. The pressure to win is too great for me emotionally. I am not like the chess Grand Master, Bobby Fischer, who as a teenager was asked why he loved chess. His response: "I like to see them squirm." His personal life as an adult was a disaster.

46

THE MANDATORY TITHE

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

MATTHEW 23:23–24

The tithe rests on God as the Creator and Owner of the world. He has delegated to men the responsibility of managing the world. As a token of obedience, men are to pay God a tithe of 10% on the net increase they produce. This was a matter of hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. A New Testament Requirement

Jesus told the religious leaders of Israel that paying their tithes was the minimal requirement. They had ignored the weightier matters. This implies that the tithe is less weighty. But He made it clear that it was not optional even though it was not weighty. It was mandatory. So were the other requirements: judgment, mercy, and faith.

The church has not preached the tithe in generations. There is almost a hostility on the part of preachers to the doctrine of the tithe. We might imagine that preachers, in their quest to increase income for their churches, would emphasize this doctrine. Such is not the case. Theologians have generally relegated the law of tithing to the Mosaic law.

Jesus spoke of the tithe as so minimal a burden as to be almost not

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

worth considering. "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." They had tithed on the smallest of increases. They had sought to keeps the letter of the Mosaic law, but they had ignored the spirit of that law-order. He told them that they were not remiss in paying close attention to their tithes. They were remiss in not paying equal attention to the weightier matters of the law. All are worth upholding.

This passage could be dismissed as pertaining only to Old Covenant Israel. But if this line of argumentation is valid, then everything that Jesus recommended or commanded is subject to the same easy dismissal. He spent His earthly ministry preaching to people who lived under the Mosaic Covenant. To strip His words of their binding authority because Jesus and His listeners were under the Mosaic Law is to turn the gospels into Old Testament documents.

God is both Creator and Owner under the New Covenant. To imagine that the tithe is no longer morally and legally binding in the New Testament era is to sever the dominion covenant's hierarchy. Man is then seen as not being under any legal requirement to pay God His lawful percentage of all economic increases. What has changed in the New Covenant to establish such a covenantal discontinuity? What is the New Testament principle that has severed the binding relationship between owner and steward? The tithe is a manifestation of this hierarchy of ownership.

Man is God's sharecropper. God provides capital to His stewards. This is capital in the broadest sense: talents, opportunities, raw materials, money, and an understanding of the laws of cause and effect. God also provides life. Most of all, God provides a legal covering—redemption—in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The sharecropper is supposed to pay a fixed percentage return on the output of this capital. To deny the legal obligation of the tithe is either to assert a fundamental legal autonomy for man, or, in contrast, a much greater degree of economic obligation than the tithe, which implies that man can placate God's wrath by offering gifts of greater value than the tithe.[2]

The New Testament principle of covenantal subordination is manifested in the same three oath-bound covenantal institutions: church, family, and state. There is no indication in the New Testament that children owe less to parents than children owed under the Mosaic law. Paul wrote: "Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 56.

thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:2–3). This passage indicates that the church is entitled to the tithe, just as Melchizedek the priest of Salem was entitled to Abram's tithe (Gen. 14:20), and just as the Levites were (Num. 18:21, 26).[3] There is also no indication that a system of civil government that takes as much as a tithe in taxes is any less a tyranny than the prophesied king in Israel (I Sam. 8:15, 17).

The two other Mosaic tithes were tithes of celebration. There was a mandatory annual celebration held in Jerusalem, funded by a tithe (Deut. 14:23). There was another celebration held locally every third year (Deut. 14:28).[4] These were national and tribal celebrations. They were land laws. They did not extend into the New Covenant.

We are often told that the tithe is not legally binding, but we should give "as the Holy Spirit leads." But why would the Holy Spirit lead people to donate less than a tithe? The Bible teaches that the tithe is the minimum payment.

B. Guilt and Government

By placing a minimum on what men owe, God's law reduces the burden of guilt. The person who pays his tithe to his local congregation has met his legal obligation to God.[5] If God calls him to give more than a tithe, this request can be regarded as a special obligation, one that is in some way consistent with the special situation of the donor. The situation is not normal. The general obligation has both a floor and a ceiling: a tithe.

The man who sees his obligation as greater than 10% has some reason to think this. He could be incorrect. If he makes a mistake here, there is no reason for him to worry that he has not done enough for God. A mistake is not a moral infraction. He has met the minimum requirement with his tithe.

The reduction of guilt is important for building men and societies that are innovative. Bearing measurable risk or unmeasurable uncertainty is important in overcoming the limits placed on the creation by God's curse (Gen. 3:17–19).[6] A man who is burdened by guilt has

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10. Cf. North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 35.

5. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas,

trouble functioning in a balanced manner. He never knows when he will receive negative sanctions for his rebellion. Guilt can produce workaholics, but it can also produce alcoholics. Overcoming guilt is not to be a motivation for extending the kingdom of God in history. Such motivation places too much reliance on the works of men in pleasing God.

Paul's ministry could be interpreted as the work of a man attempting to overcome guilt. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (I Tim. 1:15). It would be a mistake to see Paul as guilt-motivated. He continued: "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (I Tim. 1:16). His call into service to God began with God's mercy. That was what had overcome his guilt. His work was a response to this legal condition of judicial innocence. He was first among sinners and first among the redeemed. His life was to serve as a pattern for others similarly redeemed from guilt.

Paul gave far more than a tithe. He recounted his suffering for the gospel.

> Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (II Cor. 11:23–27).

His was not a normal Christian life, but it was consistent with the call to comprehensive sacrifice. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1–2).[7]

Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 12.

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 7.

Then why doesn't God require more than a tithe? Because the tithe is judicially representative. It declares, "I give up 10% of my net income as a symbol of my subordination." God has established a symbol of subordination: the tithe. This percentage is sufficient to eliminate most of those whose faith is not sufficient to identify them as reliable leaders. They do not obey; so, they are not reliable to lead. They refuse to adhere to the terms of the church covenant; so, they should not be allowed to impose ecclesiastical sanctions, which includes voting in church. He who does not acknowledge the legitimacy of covenantal sanctions above him should not be allowed to impose covenantal sanctions on those below him. We understand this hierarchical principle in family government and civil government. Many Christians do not understand it in church government.

The problem is, too many pastors are not convinced that God has mandated a tithe for today's Christians. They do not preach tithing. Congregations do not use the tithe to differentiate voting members from non-voting communicant members. The result is a weakening of church authority and a reduction of church income. Pastors are reduced to begging their congregations to fund the work of Christ's kingdom. This fosters a mental image of Jesus as a beggar. He is not a beggar. He is the king who demands tribute from His vassals.

Conclusion

Jesus told the Pharisees that they owed God a tithe on the smallest portion of their income. They owed God a lot more than this, but the obligation was not economic. They owed judgment, mercy, and faith. Tithing and judgment are two sides of the same coin. Similarly, to seek to exercise judgment, mercy, and faith apart from obeying the law of the tithe also testifies against the qualifications of the would-be judge.

47

PROFIT AND INTEREST

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

MATTHEW 25:14–30

The theocentric principle here was God's ownership of the creation. He establishes the terms of tenancy. Men possess resources only as stewards of God. God will come at the end of history to judge each person's performance as a steward. This was hierarchy: point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Delegated Ownership[2]

This passage appears in the same section as Jesus' description of the final judgment (Matt. 25:31–46). This parable is a kingdom parable. It follows the five-point covenant model that was discovered by Ray Sutton. First, the master calls his servants before him (sovereignty). Second, he delegates authority to them as his economic representatives by transferring money to them (hierarchy/representation). Third, while it is not stated explicitly, he commands them to produce an increase (law/dominion). We know this because all three immediately take steps to obey his implicit economic command. Fourth, he returns and imposes positive sanctions: blessings to the profitable servants. Fifth, the blessings that he gives them involve rulership (succession/continuity). He then imposes negative sanctions against the unprofitable servant, casting him into outer darkness (disinheritance).

This parable contains several theological messages, but the three main ones are these: first, God owns all things; second, He delegates temporary control over these things to men; third, men are required to increase the value of whatever God has entrusted to them.

There are also secondary implications. First, the servants were required to act on their own initiative for an indefinite time period. The master was not present to tell them precisely what to do. Second, he imposed a profit management system of control, a bottom-up hierarchy.[3] He wisely decentralized his investment portfolio before he departed. He allowed his subordinates to make their own decisions regarding the proper use of his capital. He held them legally respon-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

2. This bulk of this chapter appeared first in Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

3. Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1944). Reprinted by Libertarian Press, 1983.

sible for the results. Third, he had plans beyond this first stage of stewardship. He was using this stage as a test.

B. Profitability

Profit is a residual that remains after all expenses have been paid, including the entrepreneur's salary as a manager. The entrepreneur buys or rents resources, holds them and possibly alters them, and sells them for more than he paid. He can do this only because his competitors did not recognize the opportunity. They did not enter the free market for factors of production and bid up their prices. Their lack of foresight is what enabled the entrepreneur to buy up the resources at prices lower than those which prevailed when he sold them later. He had an advantage based on better knowledge and the courage of his convictions.

The economist distinguishes between risk and uncertainty.[4] Risk can be estimated in advance; uncertainty cannot be. Risk is the kind of calculation that applies to insurance. In certain well-defined situations, the law of large numbers applies. The probability of an event, such as an economic loss through a fire, can be estimated within statistical limits. There is risk, but it can be calculated. Not so with uncertainty. An uncertain event is not part of a larger class of events. Its probability cannot be calculated in advance.

The man who received five talents made a return of 100%. So did the man who received two talents. The owner granted them rewards because of their productivity. Clearly, this has to do with rewards beyond the grave. But these rewards are based on performance in history. This is consistent with Paul's teaching: "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Cor. 3:12–15).[5]

The corollary of profit is loss. A man may misforecast the future. He buys or rents resources, only to discover later that they are worth less than he paid for them. The fear of loss is an important factor in

4. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921).

5. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 3.

restricting the market for entrepreneurship. It is a major barrier to entry.

C. Marxism as Covenant-Breaking

What about the person who takes no risks, buries his talent, and returns to the master only what he had been given initially? This man has produced a loss for the master. He is a highly unprofitable servant. He has not performed according to minimum standards.

Like so many other incompetent, slothful people in history, the servant of the parable tries to justify his poor performance by blaming the master. He accuses the master of being a thief, or at least an unscrupulous exploiter. "Then he which had received one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine" (vv. 24–25).

What was the slothful servant's accusation of the master? Clearly, he was accusing him of being a *capitalist*. The master is rich, yet he does not go into the fields to labor. the master expects a positive return on his money, even though he goes away on a journey. In short, the servant is an incipient Marxist. He believes, as Marx did, in the labor theory of value. He also believes in Marx's exploitation theory of profits. Anyone who gets money without working for a living is nothing but an exploiter, living on the labor of the poor. The servant calls him "a hard man." (Theologically speaking, this is the covenant-breaker's accusation against God: God is an unfair exploiter.)

The master accepts the ideological challenge. He reminds the servant that he is indeed a hard man, meaning someone who has the lawful authority to establish standards of profitable performance, as well as the authority to hand out rewards and punishments. He admits freely to the servant that, as a successful capitalist, he does not personally go into the fields to plant and reap, yet he reaps a profit. "His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed" (v. 26). Then he tells the servant the minimum that he is entitled to, an interest return: "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury" (v. 27). Luke 19:23 reads: "Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?"

D. The Legitimacy of Interest

The King James translators used the English word "usury" to translate a Greek word that is more accurately translated as "interest." This discussion of interest here is very revealing, for two reasons. First, *this parable of God's kingdom acknowledges that interest-taking is legitimate*. God eventually comes to every person and demands a positive return on whatever had been entrusted to him by God. The master had done without the use of his funds during his absence. He is therefore entitled to a minimum return: interest.

Second, *the parable clearly distinguishes between profits and interest*. The other two stewards each produced a profit of 100%. They received the greater praise and greater visible rewards. The minimum required performance was an interest payment. The slothful servant had been unwilling to take even the minimal risk of handing the money over to specialists in money-lending, who would seek out entrepreneurs to lend the money to, entrepreneurs who would then pay a competitive return to the money-lenders on this passively managed investment.

In other words, the master's capital was supposed to enable the servants to become productive. Each steward had to become an entrepreneur, or else had to seek out an entrepreneur who would put the money to economically productive uses. The talent was not to sit in the earth; it was to perform a socially useful function.

1. The Entrepreneur and the Banker

The economic agent who is on the cutting edge of both prediction and production is the entrepreneur. The first two men in the parable were entrepreneurs. They went out and found ways of investing the master's money that produced a positive rate of return. As the parable presents it, this rate of return was higher than what could have been earned by depositing the money with money-lenders. Thus, the entrepreneur is understood to be someone who bears much greater risk than someone who deposits money in a bank. The economist calls this form of risk *uncertainty*. It cannot be estimated in advance. It involves guesswork, unlike the depositor who is promised a specific rate of interest when he deposits his money.

The only way that the banker can afford to pay out a promised return is because he successfully seeks out borrowers (entrepreneurs or customers) who produce an even higher rate of return. The banker makes his living on the difference between the interest payment which the borrower pays to him and what he in turn pays to the depositors.

The future is uncertain to men. We do not know it perfectly. We barely know it at all. We see the future as though we were peering through a darkened glass (I Cor. 3:12). Nevertheless, all of life involves forecasting. There is no escape. We must all bear some degree of uncertainty. But some people are willing to bear more of it than others, and of these, some are more successful in dealing with it. In economic terminology, some people produce greater profits than others. Profit is a *residual* that remains, if at all, only after all costs of the business have been paid, including interest.

2. Banking: Reducing Uncertainty

The banker is able to offer a special service to investors. He can diversify depositors' uncertainty by lending to many people—people who, like the servants in the parable, have performed successfully in the past. They have "a track record," to use the language of horse racing. By lending out money to many borrowers, the banker therefore converts a portion of the depositors' uncertainty into risk, meaning from the statistically incalculable to the statistically calculable. The banker is like an insurer. In fact, in the Middle Ages, the bank was an insurance company, since both church and state had made it illegal for Christians to ask or pay interest.[6] The modern profession of banking grew out of the marine insurance guild, which was legal in the Middle Ages.[7]

What does an insurance company do? Its statisticians (actuarians) calculate the likelihood of certain kinds of undesirable events in large populations. These unpleasant events cannot be statistically calculated individually, but they can be calculated collectively if the population involved is large enough. The seller of insurance then persuades members of these large populations to pay periodic premiums so as to "pool" their risks. When one member of the pool suffers the event that has been insured against, he is reimbursed from the pool of assets. Hence, some of life's inescapable and individually incalculable uncertainties are converted to calculable risk by means of diversification: "the law of large numbers."[8]

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6. Jews could legally lend to Christians, which is why Jews from the Middle Ages onward have been found in banking. It was a near-monopoly granted to them by Christian legislators.

7. John T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), ch. 10.

8. Peter Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1996).

The same is true of banking. Borrowers will seldom all go bankrupt at once. Most borrowers will repay their debts as specified in their loan agreements. Bad loans are more than offset by the good ones. Thus, the banker can offer a fixed rate of return to depositors. In almost all cases, depositors will be repaid as promised because most of the borrowers repay their loans as promised. (The exception is in a depression, when banks fail. Depressions are the result of prior monetary inflation, which in our day means fractional reserve banking.[9])

What we must understand is that the master in this parable protects his funds in much the same way. He seeks out a group of potential entrepreneurs. He gives each of them an amount of money to invest. He makes predictions regarding their future performance based on their past performance, and then he allocates the distribution of his assets in terms of this estimation. He protects his portfolio by diversification.

The master is not an interest-seeking banker, however. The money he invests is his own. He is not acting as the legal agent of other depositors. He legally claims all of the profits. He does not contract with borrowers who agree in advance to pay him a fixed rate of interest. The entrepreneurs are strictly his legal subordinates, unlike the relationship between banker and borrower.

E. The Forfeited Productivity of Inaction

The master in the parable is outraged by the coin-burying servant. The parable is intended to show the subordinate (indebted) position of all men before God. The servant was cast into outer darkness because he was an unprofitable servant (v. 30). The parable stands as a warning to all men because the Bible teaches that all people apart from grace are unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10).[10] This is why we need a profitable servant as our intermediary before God, our perfect sin-bearer. But to understand our relationship of indebtedness to God, the parable's language must be taken seriously. We cannot make accurate theological conclusions about the broader meaning of the parable if the symbolic reference points of the parable are themselves inaccurate, let alone immoral.

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9. Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1949), ch. 20.

10. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 41. This was published first as "Unprofitable Servants," *Biblical Economics Today* (Feb./March 1983).

There is no question that the master not only approves of taking interest, he sends the servant to the nether regions for not taking it. This is strong imagery! *The interest payment belongs to the master*. By having refused to deposit the master's money with the money-lenders, the servant has in effect stolen the master's rightful increase. The servant was legally obligated to protect the master's interests, and interest on his money was the minimum requirement. He failed. The master's judgment of the servant's past performance had been accurate; he was entitled to only one talent initially, for he had not demonstrated competence previously. Had he been given more, he would have wasted more.

The idea that the interest return was the master's minimum expectation leads us to the question of *the origin of interest*. Why did the master deserve an interest return? Because he had possession of an asset that could have been put to productive use, but was not. He had forfeited the use of his money. Any asset that a person possesses in the present is worth more to him than the possession of the same asset in the future. We apply a discount to future assets in relation to those same assets in the present.[11] Additionally, by transferring the coin to a third party, the owner was forfeiting control over an asset. He was therefore taking on risk: the possibility of no repayment. This risk had to be paid for by the servant.

The dual issues of time-preference and risk relate to the existence of a rate of interest: money-lending. But there was an additional issue, which relates to income: *forfeited opportunities*. A lender transfers to another person the use of an asset, monetary or nonmonetary. He has given up whatever other opportunities might have been available to him. The steward owed him something extra in return. Yet the steward accused the master of being a hard man, meaning an unfair man. The steward thought he owed nothing to the owner beyond what had been entrusted to him.

The master in the parable was being gracious to the servant. He recognized from the beginning that the man was not very competent. The master did not tell the servant that he had failed because he had not made 100% on the money entrusted to him. He told him only that he had failed because he had not earned an interest payment. This is the least that the master legitimately expected.

The master probably could have doubled his money by entrusting it to either of the first two servants. But he had sought greater eco-

11. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 19.

nomic safety instead. He had adopted the principle of *risk reduction through portfolio diversification*. You get a lower rate of return but a more sure return. But the master had been cheated. He could have deposited his money directly with the money-lenders instead of giving it to the servant. That would have been safer—greater diversification through the bank—and it almost certainly would have produced a positive rate of return, however low. Instead, he received only his original capital in return.

He had forfeited his legitimate interest payment because he had transferred the asset to the slothful, risk-aversive servant. This servant is a model of wickedness, not because he was actively evil, but that he was *passively unproductive*. He did nothing with that which had been entrusted to him. Doing nothing is sufficient to get you cast into hell, when doing the minimum would at least quench the Master's wrath. (Warning: only one man in history has ever performed this minimum: Jesus Christ.)

F. Interest and Capitalization

Is interest-taking morally legitimate? This debate has been going on since at least the days of Aristotle, who regarded money as sterile and interest therefore unnatural.[12] But if money is sterile, why have men throughout history paid lenders interest in order to gain access to its use for a period? How are so many people fooled into paying for the use of a sterile asset? Besides, interest is a phenomenon of every loan, not just loans of money. Modern economics teaches this; so does the Bible.[13]

It is obvious that the phenomenon of interest is not confined to money. Aristotle was incorrect. *The phenomenon of interest applies to every scarce economic resource*. We always discount future value. What-

12. "For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term interest, which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the breeding of money because the offspring resembles the parent. That is why of all modes of getting wealth, this is the most unnatural." Aristotle, The Politics, I:9, Stephen Everson, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 15.

13. "Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase" (Lev. 25:37). "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it" (Deut. 23:19–20). Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 57.

ever we use in the present is worth more to us than the prospect of using that same item in the future. *The present commands a price premium over the future*.

The present is now. Our responsibility is now. We deal with our responsibility now. God holds us responsible now. We make all of our decisions in the present. We enjoy the use of our assets in the present. While wise people plan for the future by purchasing expected streams of future income by buying assets that they expect to produce net income over time, they purchase these hoped-for streams of income at a discount. The *rate of discount* that we apply to any stream of expected future income is called the *rate of interest*. Mises called it *time-preference*.[14]

Thus, the rate of interest is not exclusively a monetary phenomenon. *Interest is a universal discount that we apply to every economic service that we expect to receive in the future*. We buy a hoped-for stream of income. We can buy it for cash, but we usually demand a discount for cash. This purchase at a discount for cash is called *capitalization*. It is the heart of capitalism. It is the heart of every society more advanced than the utterly primitive.

The person who lends money at zero interest is clearly forfeiting a potential stream of income. He will seldom do this voluntarily, except for charitable reasons. The ownership of the asset offers him an expected stream of income: psychological, physical, or monetary. If it did not offer such a stream of income, it would be a free good. It would therefore not command a price. The owner expects to receive a stream of income. He chooses the degree of risk that he is willing to accept, and he then refuses to lend the asset for less than the interest rate appropriate to this degree of risk.

The borrower compensates the owner for his use of the owner's asset, or its exchange value, for a specified period of time. He borrows it only because he values its stream of services more highly than he values the extra payment (interest) to the owner above the rental income generated by the asset. He expects to make a profit of some kind on the temporary exchange of control over it.

Conclusion

Non-fractional reserve banking and the taking of interest are both biblically legitimate. The parable of the talents should be sufficient

14. Mises, *Human Action*, ch. 19.

proof for anyone who is not trying to make an overnight theological reputation for himself based on the promotion of the utterly fantastic. We should take the Bible seriously in preference to Aristotle, and also in preference to the "economics of love."[15] The capitalization of long-term assets, including human services, is biblically legitimate.

Again, I acknowledge that men, in their quest for autonomy from God, are willing to become slaves of sin, and therefore in principle slaves of other men. I recognize the New Testament principle that it is best to owe no man anything (Rom. 13:8a).[16] I also recognize that modern economics has promoted the ideal of perpetual debt for perpetual prosperity, and has then monetized the national debt.[17] A world so constructed will eventually collapse. But there is no biblically or economically valid justification for passing civil laws that prohibit voluntary credit-debt transactions. Such legislation rests on a denial of the inescapable discounting (capitalization) process between the present value of present goods and the present value of expected future goods. *Usury laws are price controls that try to equate present value and future value*. They inevitably misallocate resources.

With respect to capitalized debt, if both the lender and the borrower agree that a piece of collateral is acceptable in exchange for the defaulted loan, then the debtor is not in debt, net. He has an offsetting asset. He wants money in cash; the lender would rather have money over time. The existence of the collateral reduces the likelihood that the debtor will default. The debtor is therefore not a servant of the lender in this case. Nevertheless, if the loan involves the potential loss of a man's home, meaning his status and his own self-evaluation, then he is in a form of bondage. But if he owns investment assets (a house, for example) with a mortgage on it, and he risks losing the house if he defaults, then this voluntary transaction is merely a shifting of risk to the liking of both transactors. The lender feels better about the future with a stream of income guaranteed by the value of the collateral. The borrower feels better about owning the collateral and paying the money. Neither is a servant; neither is a master.

The top priority here is the multiplication of assets in the broadest sense. God grants assets to His stewards. He demands a positive rate

15. North, *Authority and Dominion*, Appendix J: "Lots of Free Time: The Existentialist Utopia of S. C. Mooney."

16. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 12.

17. The central bank purchases debt by creating money to purchase it.

of return.[18] He who hides his assets is comparable to the person who hides his candle under a basket. God is cheated by such seemingly low-risk investing.

18. This is possible only because He wipes away the effects of sin.

48

DISCIPLING THE NATIONS

> *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*
>
> MATTHEW 28:18–20

This is the Great Commission. Its theocentric focus is the resurrected Christ as sovereign over heaven and earth in history. This was the issue of inheritance: point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Discipline and Law

A disciple is under discipline. He is under authority. If he breaks the rules imposed by the authority, he is punished, i.e., disciplined.

This text, more than any other in the New Testament, places the nations under Jesus Christ. The text calls on Christians to disciple the nations, i.e., the various peoples of the earth. The word "nations" implies collectives. This is not a call to make disciples of individuals as covenant-free individuals. It is a command to bring covenanted nations under God's authority by way of their rulers and citizens. This means that the entire individual is to be redeemed in all of his institutional covenantal relationships: church, family, and state.

To bring someone under discipline means that you must have rules. The discipling of the nations is inescapably a judicial matter:

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The question is: What has the church been commanded?

> If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15).
>
> He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him (John 14:21).
>
> If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love (John 15:10).
>
> And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (I John 2:3–4).
>
> And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (I John 3:22).
>
> And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us (I John 3:24).
>
> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (I John 5:2–3).

The New Testament's focus is on the individual and the church. Family government is mentioned, but not nearly so often as ecclesiastical government. There are issues of life and death that concern civil government, but these are rarely discussed specifically in the New Testament. This has led conservative Bible commentators to conclude that the New Testament is not concerned with social and political issues. But this assertion raises a major question: How are we to disciple the nations? If there are no explicitly biblical standards for right and wrong—economically, politically, socially, militarily—then how can the national discipling process take place?

B. Old Covenant Civil Laws

I have categorized the Mosaic law under seed laws/land laws, priestly laws, and cross-boundary laws.[2] Those laws having to do with the fulfillment of Jacob's messianic prophecy—seed laws and tribal laws—were annulled with the resurrection/ascension of Christ. This

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion.

prophecy announced: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). Seed laws were tribal laws that preserved Judah's line. Next, there were land laws, which had to do with the conquest of Canaan and the genocide of the Canaanites. These were modified with the return of Israel from captivity (Ezek. 47:22–23). They were annulled with the declaration by Jesus of the Jubilee year (Luke 4:18–21).[3] The priestly laws were annulled in principle with the advent of Christ: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life" (Heb. 7:12–16). They were annulled historically with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70.

This leaves the cross-boundary laws. It was these that God mandated for Nineveh. They are still in force unless annulled by the New Testament. The New Testament does not explicitly repeat most of these cross-boundary laws. An obvious one is bestiality. "And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast. And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them" (Lev. 20:15–16). Most conservative commentators argue that for an Old Testament civil law to be mandatory in the New Covenant era—let alone the specified civil sanction—it must be explicitly recapitulated in the New Testament. They have a major problem with this passage. This sin is not mentioned in the New Testament, yet commentators have not rushed to announce its abrogation. But they do not know what to do with it and its mandatory capital sanction.

The preservation of any social order requires laws and civil sanctions. The question is: What is the proper source of these laws? Is it the Bible? Or is it fallen man's mind, which is under the authority of one or another god, ending with would-be autonomous man? The Great Commission points out the inescapable task of bringing all so-

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

cieties under God. But how can this be done if there is no legal order that is uniquely Christian? This is the Great Commission's great dilemma for political pluralists.

Conclusion

The Great Commission is a call to the comprehensive subduing of the whole world. It is the New Covenant's recapitulation of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28).[4] It is not limited to personal evangelism. Personal evangelism is the beginning of the discipling of the nations, but it is not the end. Modern pietism would like to limit the Great Commission to personal evangelism, church government, and family renewal—three of the four covenants. But the pietist joins the humanist when it comes to civil government. He rejects any suggestion that civil government or society at large must be brought formally under the kingship of Christ, at least during the era of the church before Christ comes again physically to set up an earthly kingdom (premillennialism).

The Great Commission is greater than pietism. It is comprehensive. *Wherever sin reigns, there the Great Commission applies*. To argue otherwise is to argue either that the Great Commission does not have as its standard the eradication of sin, or else that natural law—the hypothetically unified civil and moral order that springs from the minds of fallen men—is somehow without the taint of sin. This latter proposition is difficult to reconcile with the doctrine of original sin. The Great Commission applies to the state as well as the family and the church.[5]

This means that civil laws regulating the exchange of goods and services, contracts, and justice must come from the Bible. But the New Testament rarely comments on these matters. Thus, we must turn to the Old Testament for guidance. We must ask, "If not biblical law, then what?" We must ask, "By what other standard?"[6] The Great Commission should move us back to the Bible, not to pagan natural law theory.

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4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 1.

5. *Ibid*., ch. 10.

6. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991).

CONCLUSION

> *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*
>
> MATTHEW 6:33

The theme of the kingdom of God/heaven pervades Matthew. This Gospel is the premier Gospel of the kingdom. We learn that *the kingdom of God should be man's supreme earthly goal*—a kingdom based on righteousness. All other temporal goals are secondary.

This raises the question of the dominion covenant. God gave man his marching orders: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26–28).[1]

A. Top Priority: God's Kingdom

If the kingdom of God is supposed to be man's top priority, than what has become of the dominion covenant? Nothing. It still operates. Kingdom-first is the same requirement. What was universal under Adam prior to his rebellion has become the specific requirement for God's covenant people. The general requirement also remains, which is why there is a powerful impetus in cultures to extend their

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3–4.

wealth and power. The dominion covenant is embodied today by two rival manifestations: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Both are supernatural. Both reveal themselves in history. An increase in one in history is offset by a decrease in the other: wheat vs. tares.

It is basic to man's nature to extend his control over the creation. Covenant-breakers still obey the dominion covenant, but they do this for the sake of other gods, including man. But because of biblical adoption, assets built up in Satan's kingdom can wind up in Christ's. This is one of God's ways of appropriating the wealth of the wicked. What the wicked lose as covenant-breakers they inherit as covenant-keepers. Because they come under a new covenant, so do their assets.

The New Testament has not abrogated the dominion covenant. The kingdom of God is not in conflict with the dominion covenant. On the contrary, it is the fulfillment of it. The world was always supposed to be subdued by man for the glory of God. This means that covenant-keeping man must do the bulk of the subduing if the dominion covenant is to be fulfilled appropriately. If covenant-breakers do the bulk of the subduing throughout history, then the Bible is incorrect: "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[2] If the wealth of the just were laid up for the sinner, then sinners would permanently inherit in history. Satan's kingdom would then permanently displace God's by way of Adam. This would mean that Christ's resurrection and ascension have not definitively overcome the effects of Adam's Fall and will in history progressively overcome them. Then how should the following be interpreted?

> But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (I Cor. 15:20–28).

2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

Or this?

> For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them (Isa. 65:17–21).

The prophecy in Isaiah refers to history, not heaven, for sinners still are present. They live to an old age. Only by denying both the context and the language of the text can amillennialists get it to refer to heaven or the post-resurrection state.[3] This is the most difficult passage in the Bible for amillennialists to deal with, so they prefer to avoid it. A good example of this deliberate policy of avoiding the actual text of Scripture is Archibald Hughes, in his book, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*.[4] He does not discuss this passage; he only lists it in a list of five passages in Isaiah (p. 139). He also does not comment on Isaiah 66:22, the only other Old Testament passage in which the New Heaven and the New Earth are mentioned. He builds his case exclusively on the four New Testament texts. This is an adult's version of the children's game of "let's pretend."

B. The Theme of Priorities

God or mammon? This is what each person must decide. Once this decision is made, then the individual must assess his priorities. A person's priorities are established in terms of one of the two kingdoms.

Matthew sets forth the idea that man is subordinate either to God or mammon.[5] Man is never autonomous. He makes decisions as a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker. If he is self-consciously subordinate to God, he can work more effectively to extend God's kingdom. The extension of the kingdom's influence is accomplished by the faithful obedience of God's people. Obedience is what gives them what they need. Obedience, not magic, is the proper means

3. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 5.

4. Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958.

5. Chapter 14.

of attaining what we need.[6] Covenant-keepers are humble before God—meek—and therefore active in relation to the creation.[7] They are to march forward confidently because they are under the supreme Commander.

Matthew reminds the reader that he is responsible to God. Responsible people carry the burden of Christian activism. They are more ready to take risks for God and the kingdom. Their fear is reduced because they know that God is sovereign. As His agents, they are part of a large endeavor that spans time and geography. This larger endeavor gives meaning to their efforts, even when they fail. God does not make mistakes; He sees everything in advance.[8] Men's work has meaning and purpose in terms of the comprehensive judicial claims of God on man and the kingdom that manifests these claims in history.

In setting his priorities, the faithful man is to decide how his work can extend the kingdom of God. He is to honor this principle: first things first.[9] Eternal life is man's primary reward.[10] This requires being part of God's kingdom: surrendering authority over one's own life in history for the sake of eternity. Therefore, the kingdom of God is primary. Money is not. Those who pursue riches are playing with fire, Matthew teaches. Greed is the religion of mammon: self-gratification and self-worship.[11] Man cannot serve two masters.

The underlying lure of wealth is personal autonomy. Wealth seems to provide this by increasing a person's range of choices. God calls us to exchange assets in our earthly treasury for assets in the eternal one.[12] This is a low-risk exchange. Assets in heaven cannot be lost. This is what the rich young ruler failed to understand.[13] Jesus asked him to sell everything as a condition of joining His disciples. He has not asked most of His followers to do this, then or now. He does ask them to tithe. The tithe is a token payment that declares that the tither is dependent on God.[14] It also drastically reduces the likelihood of addiction to the pursuit of money. Men must trust in God's reserves, not their own, which is why Jesus sent out the disciples the first time

6. Chapter 1.
7. Chapter 4.
8. Chapter 23.
9. Chapter 19.
10. Chapter 17, Chapter 24.
11. Chapter 14.
12. Chapter 13, Chapter 28.
13. Chapter 27.
14. Chapter 15.

without any money or assets.[15] This trust enables men to rest.[16]

Saving faith produces service to God by means of service to others.[17] Jesus called this taking up the cross.[18] The bearing of burdens for the sake of the kingdom affirms eternity's priority over time. But only future-oriented people can fully understand this affirmation. Covenant-breakers discount the value of eternity to close to zero. Present blessings are preferred too much to present sacrifice because future blessings are discounted too heavily. The more present-oriented a person is, the more steeply he discounts the present value of future income.

C. Wealth as a Tool of Dominion

Matthew's focus is the kingdom of God. This gospel calls men to repentance, service, and a reordering of their priorities. The kingdom is clearly both earthly and corporate. While the personal goal of service is eternal life, the kingdom itself is corporate. God's servants are part of a larger enterprise.

The message is conquest over adversity through personal subordination. This conquest is more than the subduing of individual sins. It is corporate. The tares and wheat grow together in the field of history. The goal of members of each kingdom should be to replace the other kingdom's influence.[19]

Then what of capital? If wealth is a lure to autonomy, how can God-fearing men safely accumulate capital? Only through commitment to the principle of service. Economic growth is inescapable in a social order that obeys God's laws. Jesus told the disciples that by men's fruits we shall know their character. Good men produce good fruits.[20] When applied to business, this principle means that serving the customer to his satisfaction produces wealth.[21] In a faithful society, the rich get richer, but so do the poor, even faster. The means of this increase in wealth per capita is capital formation. But the most universal motive for capital formation is the desire to increase one's wealth. Thus, the means of reducing poor people's poverty is the desire of investors to get richer.[22]

15. Chapter 22.
16. Chapter 25.
17. Chapter 6, Chapter 10, Chapter 41.
18. Chapter 35.
19. Chapter 27.
20. Chapter 18.
21. Chapter 41.
22. Chapter 28.

There seems to be a conflict here. Jesus praised sacrifice, warned again too much wealth, yet suggested that covenantal faithfulness will produce a kingdom victory. If wealth is to be avoided, but the kingdom is to be victorious in history, does this mean that this victory is exclusively spiritual, i.e., beyond per capita investment, even including tithe-funded missionaries' salaries? There are Christian traditions that affirm this. Are they correct?

Matthew must be read in terms of the first five books of the Bible. It is clear in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 that covenantal faithfulness produces corporate wealth, while covenantal rebellion produces poverty. Jesus did not break with this covenantal system of cause and effect, but He did not spend time teaching it, either. He was concerned with what happens when men achieve wealth: they forget God. That was Moses' concern, too (Deut. 8:17–18). This is the sin of autonomy.

Obedience to God is the key to personal success in history as well as kingdom success.[23] But Jesus focused on kingdom expansion, not wealth expansion. He was so aware of the positive economic effects of tithing[24] and using one's talents effectively[25] that He felt compelled to warn men against the effects of covenantal self-discipline: wealth leading to the sin of autonomy. This was Moses' theme and Solomon's (Prov. 30:8–9).

D. All These Things

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (Matt. 6:31). These are the basics. What of shelter? It is not mentioned here. Yet building a house is basic to man's dominion. This is why God had Solomon build His house.

Is this passage a defense of a minimal lifestyle? Is it saying that the most we can hope for is food, drink, and clothing, and only after we seek the kingdom? In the modern industrial world, most people have these things. This was also true of Israel under the kingship. David wrote: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). Modern man has a great deal more than these things. Steady economic growth, compounding year after year, created wealth in the year 2000 that would have been inconceivable in 1800.

23. Chapter 6.
24. Chapter 15.
25. Chapter 47.

Are we to imagine that God has placed before us poverty as an ideal? Are we to seek no more than a poor man owns in our day? Or are these three things—food, drink, and clothing—representative of all the comforts of home, including a home? I think the context indicates that this is the case. The kingdom of God is comprehensive. It encompasses everything. Therefore, the things promised are equally comprehensive.

Long-term economic growth is the cure for widespread poverty. Nothing else has ever worked. Charity ameliorates the conditions of a few, but it is limited by the resources of charitable people—always a minority. Economic growth provides sources of productivity and therefore income for an increasing population. What able-bodied, mentally capable poor people personally need for economic success is this: opportunity, self-discipline, a sense of personal responsibility, specialized knowledge, a work ethic, and future-orientation. What they need environmentally is this: a private property law-order, a high division of labor, high rates of investment, social peace, open markets.

Is the kingdom of God opposed to any of this? No. Does it promote wealth for all? Yes. Does it promote riches for all? No. Its view of riches is the same as Solomon's: riches can be hazardous to our spiritual health. Just as great beauty can be a temptation to the woman who possesses it,[26] so is great wealth to its owner.

When the Pareto's 20-80 wealth-distribution curve moves to the right, this means that everyone gets richer. But, because the increase in wealth is so slow, most people do not perceive that they are gaining wealth. They mentally adjust to greater wealth. Their tastes change. Their appetites increase. They perceive ever-greater wealth as normal: their just deserts. Then covenant-breakers are tempted to forget God. They attribute their wealth to themselves. When they do this, they depart from the source of their wealth. If their wealth increases after this, it becomes a snare to them and to the whole society. Negative sanctions will eventually be imposed by God.

Conclusion

The Gospel of Matthew does not present the case for great wealth. It presents the case against great wealth. Jesus set forth principles of obedience that produce wealth, according to the Mosaic law, yet He

26. "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion" (Prov. 11:22).

warned against great personal wealth. This was not because wealth is achieved primarily through disobedience to God's law. It was because it is achieved through outward obedience. It then becomes a snare. This could also be said of great beauty, but beauty is not earned. It could be said of great political power, but this attainment is limited to a handful of people in history. Wealth is the more universally desired blessing, and more easily attained than the others. The only blessings to match its appeal are good health and long life—again, rarely believed to be attainable by one's efforts until the rise of the modern health movement, itself a product of unprecedented social wealth.[27]

The New Testament makes plain what was taught but not emphasized in the Old Testament about the dangers of wealth. Wealth can be a snare. It can lead men to seek autonomy. Solomon understood this. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).[28] Wealth is the fruit of covenantal faithfulness that readily becomes a root of autonomy. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:17–18). Jesus paid far more attention to this dilemma than Moses did, just as Moses paid more attention to the covenantal origins of wealth than Jesus did.

What was revolutionary about Jesus' teaching was His doctrine of the afterlife. Only in Daniel 12:1–3 and Job 19:25–27 do we find any Old Testament references to the resurrection. Jesus made clear the extent to which a person's participation in one of two kingdoms in history places him on one side or the other of impenetrable barriers between heaven and hell (Luke 16).

27. The thought of paying for an expensive exercise club or exercise machine does not occur to peasants. They also do not go jogging.

28. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 54.